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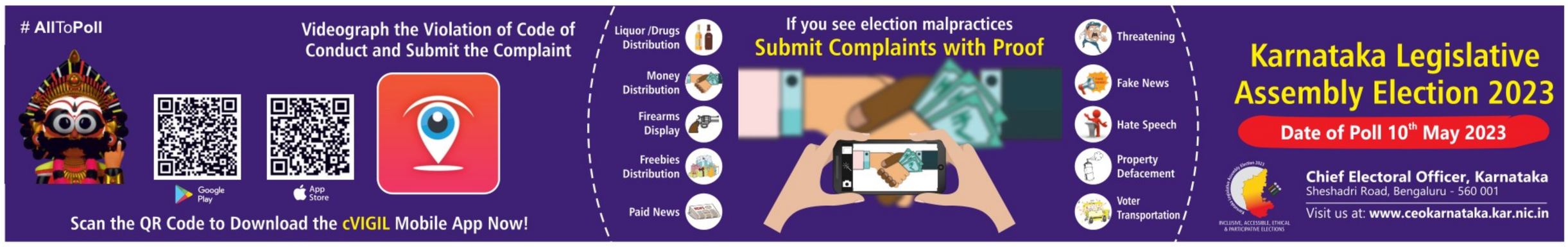

No idols, no arms: the Pattanam mystery

The iron-age and post-iron-age site in Kerala is unveiling a period of no caste or institutionalised creed, but with a close connect to nature

Past perfect: Excavations under way at Pattanam village in Ernakulam district, Kerala. SIBI MANJALI

P.J. Cherian
Deepak P.
PATTANAM

In the serene village of Pattanam in central Kerala lies the only multicultural archaeological site on the southwestern coast of the Indian subcontinent. Often referred to as the 'first emporium' of the Indian Ocean, Muziris – of which Pattanam is part – is an example of the Greco-Roman classical age coming into direct contact with an ancient South Indian civilisation.

Excavations so far, that have unearthed less than 1% of the site, point to a startling fact: there is no evidence that institutionalised religion existed in ancient Pattanam. There was certainly no indication of the graded inequality embodied in the caste system that has characterised contemporary Kerala and most of the rest of India.

The technological, metallurgical, literary, and artistic advances of this phase bear witness to rigorous cultural and commercial exchanges. The Pattanam excavations have unearthed over 45 lakh sherds (ceramic fragments); these include approximately 1.4 lakh belonging to the littoral regions of the Mediterranean, the River Nile, the Red Sea, the western and eastern Indian Oceans, and the South China Sea. Recent findings include the seal of a sphinx, native to the ancient Greek city of Thebes.

This wide span of locations confirms the existence of a thriving urban centre from the 5th century B.C. till the 5th century A.D., with its peak phase from 100 B.C. to A.D. 300.

Amidst the excitement of seeing the overwhelming treasure trove, researchers asked another key question: What are the things that did not emerge from Pattanam?

Pattanam has not chosen to delight archaeologists with idols of gods and goddesses, or the remains of grandiose places of worship. This iron-age and post-iron-age site was also bereft of sophisticated weaponry. This is in sharp contrast with some Pattanam-contemporary sites such as Berenike in Egypt and Khor Rori in Oman.

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March sees second highest GST collection of ₹1.6 lakh crore

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues grew 13% in March, to record the second highest monthly collection of ₹1.6 lakh crore from the indirect tax, with receipts from goods imports rising 8% and inflows from domestic transactions and services imports rising 14% from a year ago.

Gross GST collections for 2022-23 are 22% higher than in 2021-22 at ₹18.1 lakh crore, reflecting an average gross monthly collection of almost ₹1.51 lakh crore.

The growth in GST collections in March was the fastest so far in 2023, marking the 12th month in a row that inflows were over ₹1.4 lakh crore and the fourth month in 2022-23 over the ₹1.5 lakh crore mark.

March's collections were only eclipsed previously in April 2022, when collections were ₹1,67,540 crore.

Record high

Integrated GST collections hit a record high of ₹82,907 crore in March 2023, including ₹42,503 crore collected on the import of goods.

Indicating an uptick in compliance levels, returns filed by taxpayers in March has been the highest ever, the Finance Ministry said. "93.2% of statement of invoices (in GSTR-1) and 91.4% of returns (in GSTR-3B) of February were filed till March 2023 as against 83.1% and 84.7% respectively, same month last year," it emphasised.

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Toll hike on expressway put on hold

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In yet another flip-flop over toll collection, faced with strong opposition from motorists, implementation of the revised toll on the newly inaugurated Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway in poll-bound Karnataka has been put off. The new charges were scheduled to be collected from Saturday.

"We have received directions from the higher-ups not to collect the revised toll. Toll that was fixed earlier for using Bengaluru to Nidaghatta stretch of the expressway will continue," an official of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said on Saturday.

The NHAI's initial announcement to collect toll on the expressway had attracted a backlash from motorists and the Opposition parties. The new hike announcement in accordance with its decision to increase toll on all highways had angered people further as the expressway is not yet complete.

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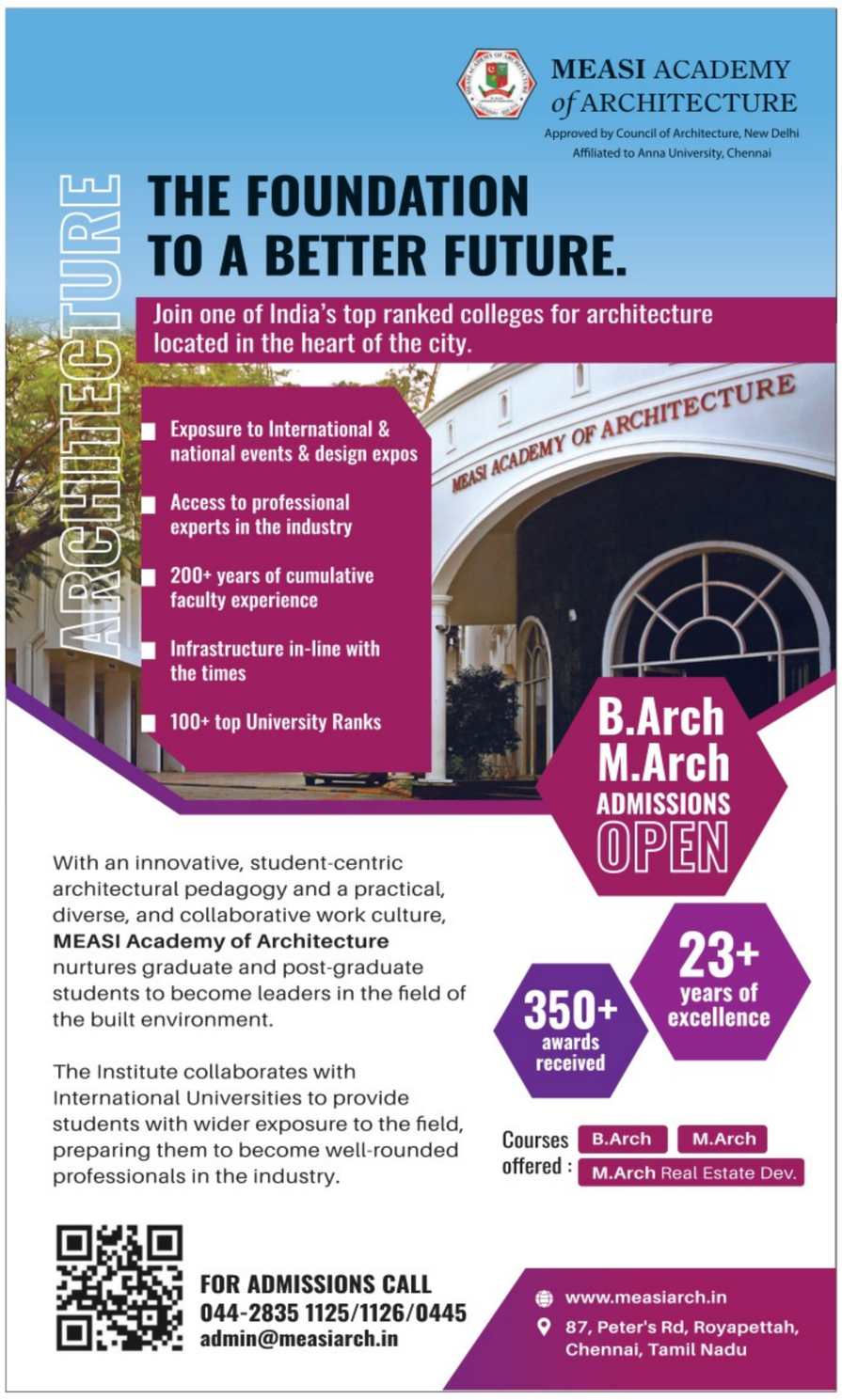
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BISCUITS

Square cut: A willow tree cut down to make cricket bats is checked before being transported to a manufacturing unit in Kashmir.

Running out of willow

Cricket bat manufacturers in Kashmir fear that the industry will not be able to survive due to a shortage of the wood

Nissar Ahmad
nissar.ahmad@thehindu.co.in

The cricket bat industry in Kashmir is on the verge of collapse, as it is facing a shortage of willow – a lightweight hardwood that is vital raw material for the manufacturing units.

More than 400 bat manufacturing units in Anantnag district of south Kashmir are staring at an uncertain future as they worry that a shortage of willow clefts (pieces of willow wood) may force their factories to shut shop.

Javeed Ahmed Parray, owner of MJ Sports, says, "We have been in this business for the past 22 years. In future, there will not be enough willow trees to fulfil the demand." The government has not supported the industry, he adds.

Mr. Parray believes that the willow tree numbers are dwindling fast, leaving the manufacturers struggling in an already competitive industry.

The centuries-old cricket bat industry in Kashmir had upped its standards over the years to compete with manufacturers that work with the fabled English willow. But bat manufacturers fear the willow shortage here could be a big blow to the ₹300-crore enterprise that provides livelihood to over 1,00,000 people. More and more cricket leagues are coming up around the world and the demand for bats has been on the increase.

Shahid Bashir, a manufacturer from Bijbehara in Anantnag, said, "We have appealed to the government to help us in growing more willow trees." He says land could be set aside for only willow cultivation. Farmers today prefer to raise trees such as poplar that grow faster than willow for supply to the plywood and building industries.

The current lot of manufacturers and workers in bat factories may well be among the last the way things are going.

Juicy shot: The lightweight hardwood of the willow in Kashmir makes it suitable for crafting cricket bats.

All in a row: Clefts of willow are stacked at a factory in Sangam in Anantnag district of south Kashmir.

Tough wicket: A carpenter expertly shapes a cricket bat.

Classifieds

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Matrimonial

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BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

COSMOPOLITAN

URDU SYED MUSLIM 23/158cm, B.Tech BioMed, deen and beautiful girl, Upper middle class family seeks Tamilnadu based Deen Groom working in European countries. Contact: +919443695850, +919629216106

KERALA HINDU Girl, 34 Yr, 165 cm, Fair, PhD, Asst. Professor, Delhi University. Seeking Er. Dr. Professionals working in Delhi / NCR / Abroad. CNB. Contact: 9447400724 / 7994313295.

DOCTOR

SUNNI, MUSLIM boy, completed MD/MS (clinical), 31 to 34 yrs, from TN belonging to a good family background to be a suitable match for our daughter, who's 30yrs, M.S. Ophthal, currently working. Contact : 9840895036

Hindu, Doctor Bride, 24 Yrs, 167cm, Sozhia Vellala, Punarpoosam, affluent family, finished PLAB, doing clinical attachment in UK, seeks Tall, tamil speaking, Doctor Groom, Studying / Working in UK, from similar background. Contact: 9443625539

DKV 27 / 155, Aswini, MBBS. Seeks Doctor Groom Only. Contact : 94429 24441 / 94431 51045

HINDU, DOCTOR MS, Reddy 32Yrs/ 165cm Fair, Affluent and Currently Settled in Chennai. Seeks Groom from Similar Background. Any Profession / Business Contact: 89256 40111

WE ARE looking for an alliance for our daughter, aged 29 years, residing in UK, PG in Medicine. The groom should hail from a decent, educated (Doctor) family. Contact with (Astrological) details Mobile. 9632737562 or Email to mpsmannoor@rediffmail.com

26 YEARS /165cm Doctor , Joining Neurology residency in June 23 at New Jersey USA. Seeks Medical Doctor Groom from BC doing Residency/ Fellowship in USA. WhatsApp 9677026459

DOCTOR GIRL MD Anesthesiology 33/ 165 fair pretty cultured & well mannered Chennai based doctors family. Father Doctor Kerala Nair, Mother Tamil CSI. Doctor grooms MD MS MCh DM & Engineers from good family background prfd. 9840050381/ 9840985383

HINDU CHETTIAR doctor 36yrs MBBS, MD (General Medicine) Divorced running hospital with 20 beds with operation theatre, Seeks suitable alliance from doctor grooms - age gap one year only CT 94433 20097.

KANNADA

KANNADA DEVANGAR parents seek groom for divorcee girl 35 yrs TN Govt. Service. Other Suitable caste considered. Ph: 7356896214, 9446591614

MALAYALAM

RCSC GIRL Pursuing Ph.D 28/170cm, Project Scientist in Govt. Organisation at Ernakulam. Seeks suitable match. Mob: 9447066266

EZHAVA GIRL, Fair, DOB 28/10/1994, 09.44 AM, doing MD (GYNEC), 2nd Year in Central Govt. Medical College, New Delhi. Proposals from Doctors / Professionals. Mob: 8281425422

HINDU – SC Girl: 37/157, Agri -Scientist - (CG-Pune) from south Kerala, seeks alliance from well educated professionals. Contact: 7972420241, 9447296008

ALLIANCE INVITED for a Menon girl, 29 years / 5ft 4inch/ Moolam (slight dosham) /MS from US, working in leading technology firm in California from parents of equally qualified boys working in US from good family. Teetotaller/vegetarians preferred.W/App 9869282807

NRI

LOOKING FOR alliance for our daughter 32/178cm. Did her BS, MS&MBA from elite universities in the US&France.Groom should be well educated from elite universities and working in UAE/UK/Singapore/USA. Please contact 00971506261499.

TAMIL

TAMIL CATHOLIC affluent Doctor parents are looking for a suitable groom working in India or Abroad for their fair, beautiful daughter 29/160, who is an accomplished Doctor, Ct: 9945530186

THE HINDU
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TAMIL

CSI NADAR Girl, MS Structural Engineering, 26/162cm, fair seeks bridegroom who is God fearing, well educated & settled, tall from an educated family. 94447 08541 / 98406 96274

AFFLUENT RC Christian family seeks Professionaly Qualified well settled Groom from respectable family for 32yrs Bride, MCA,Divorcee(issueless). 9443569083/ selvarajcecri@gmail.com

TAMIL MUSLIM Divorcee with 8 years boy, MD Dr., age 33, 163cm good looking bride seeking alliance Dr., Er., Professional Degree or business man only in chennai or abroad. Ct: H.Adambasha 98403 97405

WANTED SUITABLE and Equally Qualified Protestant Christian Nadar, Good Looking Groom, Employed in Australia Preferably in Sydney. Below 35yrs 168cm to 180cm for a Protestant Nadar Girl 160cm, Wheatish, 30yrs, MS in Bio Medical Engineering, Presently an AU Permanent Resident living and working for a Global Medical Technology Company, Sydney, Australia. 80,000 AUD–PA. Ct: 7200045725

CSI CHRISTIAN Nadar Girl Fair, Good Looking, 03–04–1986 born / 152cm / M.Sc M.Phil, working as Assistant Professor in a Reputed Women's College, Mount Road, Chennai. Both Parents Doctors (Private), Suitable Alliance, Employed / Settled in Chennai / With Clean Habits from Same Community. Contact: 9841182514

DKV MAY 94'/167 Fair BE. TCS Chennai, Parents Hindu / CSI. Seeks Groom Dr /Er. Govt Employee. 8056143638

CSI/CHRISTIAN 37yrs/165cms B.Tech (I.T), M.B.A, Eng CTS, Now at UK (Work Permit) seeks B.E & B.Tech MBBS and abroad Bride groom Ct: 9791322874, 8870560816.

SINGAPOREAN, SAIVA Pillai, CNB, Veg, Dentist, 25/158. Seeking a well–educated groom working in Singapore or willing to relocate. Contact WhatsApp : +65 91670073

MANNADIAR Girl 32/156 PhD Chemistry, Avitom, Asst.Professor, Gujarat, Vegetarian. 8281641881, 9429815230

SC AD Hindu unmarried Msc 37 Seeking Groom 8610410886.Caste No Bar. Brokers Excuse.

VANNIYAR TAMIL unmarried 57 years PG well settled seeks suitable groom between 60–70 years Ct: 6383024827

WANTED VEG, non–smoker, Non – alcoholic Brahmin boy, Japanese knowing, based or inclined to locate to Japan for 28 year old girl, Srivatsa gotram, graduate, proficient in Japanese language and working in Tokyo Japan. WhatsApp to 9845319783 or email: swarna_mohan@Hotmail.com

HINDU NADAR 23,BE 165cm (Studied CBSE) Fair Seekes Educated Well Settled Family Ct: 9840366663 Chennai

HINDU NADAR Age 25, BE, 160cm Rs.90000 PM KA Raman Nadar Contact: 9380791999

SUITABLE MATCH for girl, B.E., MBA, Deputy Manager State Bank of India, Mumbai, Age 27, Devendra Kula Vellalar, Star: Sitthirai, Rasi: Kanni, Native: Tirunelveli, Mobile: 9566897347, 6379758442

HINDU ADIDRAVIDAR Kongu Parayar 32 BE, M.Tech, PhD Seeks educated Profl groom. CT:8760883559 / 8637663072

HINDU NADAR girl, MOB 8/1994, ME, Ht 168 cms, 65 kg, Wheatish brown, Thiruvathirai, Mithunam with Chevvai Ragu Kaethu, Upper middle class Seeks equally qualified boy, well settled. Ct: 96265 15511

SUITABLE MATCH for Fair looking, IT Professional, Yadava Girl– B.E./ MBA– Yadava/ Intercaste– Age:30–31yrs– Vegetarian preferred. 9884789389

HINDU 25/160/MS, CS, USA, working for a reputed IT MNC in USA seeks suitable groom, preferably working in USA. Caste No bar. Ct: 9902806056

✔ **VANNIYAR DOCTOR MS Final Year (General Surgery) Chennai 27/164 Very Fair & Affluent, Seeking Grooms Preferably Doctors/Professionals. Send Horoscope Whatsapp 9840984065**

HINDU NADAR Divorced 32yr 1990 M.E IT. 70000 per month. Divorced Groom from same Caste & Good Family & Background. Only from Tamil Nadu / working in Bangalore also. 9445614753

HINDU 28, M.Com., PGDCA, Divorcee,working in MNC, Chennai, Caste no bar, seeks suitable Groom. Ct: 97866 16191, 94870 74569.

DOCTOR, Mudaliar, MS, 27/168,Fair& Slim Educated&Cultured,Upper Middle class family,Coimbatore seeks groom MD/MS/DNB/MCh/DM.Ct:9994498762

TAMIL

WANTED ELITE GROOM

The Girl 26 years Brahmin - Iyer Traditional Rich / Affluent family, Punarpoosam, Athreya Gothram. Brought up in a conservative and Orthodox background. Presently in family business as one of the Directors, in own manufacturing unit in Chennai.

Bridegroom to be Chennai based Iyer / Iyengar Rich / Affluent, well qualified and well settled, having Religious and Righteous values with similar background. Horoscope matching is essential.

Ct: 98840 11255 / 044-2434 0741

TAMIL

SC AD 42 years DGO, Husband died in COVID-19, seek remarriage from Doctor Groom Below 45, Contact : 9445529855

KONGU VELLALA Girl 26 doing CA (Final), Seeks CA pursuing completed Groom. CT:9363243711

HINDU MUDALIYAR Age 26, MBBS 165cm Rs.40000 PM Caste No Bar Ct: 8939691888 / 9710093999

HINDU SC AD 36yrs 161cm BE MBA, Manager(HR) in Coal India Ltd @Nagpur, Well settled,caste No Bar, Seeks Qualify Groom, 8680095094/ 8248498021

MUDALIAR (CNB) : 24/V.Fair & Beautiful, B.E, Textile Manufacturing & Export Business, Affluent Family, Seeks Groom Business / Abroad / India – 8939012419

MBBS 36 fair 5ft 1st marriage MBC well settled want BC, MBC any professional NO HOROSCOPE 9385665734

MUDALIYAR SUPER Spslty Dr. (M.Ch) 29/155 seeks groom with PG Super Spslty Dr. with MCh/DM/MS/MD. Ct: 9500085455/ 9341274028

VANNIYAKULA KSHATRIYA, fair girl, 25yrs/168cm Uthiram– 1 patham, B.E ,M.S(Engg) Australia. Father S.E, (Retd) TNEB. Seek Smart handsome Groom M.S(Engg). Ct: 9789461060

VANIYA CHETTIYAR Aswini Mesam 28/ 163 MBBS, MD final year,Pulmonology,seeks Doctor/IPS/IAS. Sub cast no bar.Ct: sendhu94@gmail.com 9840125521

WORKING PROFESSIONAL, Tuluva Vellal Mudaliar Good looking Girl 35 Uthirattathy, Meenam, Family Seeks Alliance from First and Unmarried Bachelor Bridegroom Aged 35–37 Yrs, Employed, Caste no bar. Contact: After 7 PM; 7550245659

BE /WORKING in MNC. Father Business Man, Settled Family Seeks Alliance for their Daughter. 26/Kettai, Pillai/Mudaliar or Any Caste. Call : 98400 93322

POST GRADUATE Doctor MD Anaesthesia 28 SC Govt Service seeks suitable PG Doctor groom. Ct: 7401660086

SC ADIDRAVIDAR 24/B.Com., MBA., Govt Job (Assistant Manager) Canara Bank 33000Pm Seeks Groom. 9514173518

VISWAKARMA MIRU–4,29 BTec NITT non IT Mgr 11Lpa slim beautiful Chennai.High profile invited. 9443945147

PILLAI/MUDALIAR, 33, Good looking, MBBS, MD Final yr, Well Settled family seeks Groom aged 33-36 yrs, Engineer / Business / Doctor. 9345855735

TAMIL HINDU Girl, 35, BE and MBA from leading B–School, NRI working in London in MNC, iyer family, earlier wedding nullified, alliance invited from well qualified, well employed groom from good urban family background with modern outlook, upto 40 years, marital status Any (single/divorced/widowed), caste no bar. Contact 9381856277

PILLAI 24/165, Very Fair Beautiful, MBBS,Affluent Family, Seeks India/ UK Groom,CNB. 7299576644,7299576666

REQUIRED BRIDEGROOM Tamil Sengunthar Age: 28, Qual: BE, MBA, Working in Corporate Company in Bangalore. Sub Caste no bar. Ct: 7200988849

DKV 31/164 fair B.Tech (NIT) MBA (IIT), MNC Chennai seeks bridegroom from educated family. Ct: 9940507235

BRAHMIN
BUSINESS / AFFLUENT FAMILY
A Corporate and Big Business Brahmin Family in South India invites alliance for their daughter 29/165 (who has finished masters from top class university). Matching from Affluent Family or Corporate Group.
The Boy should be tall, well educated from big business family / corporate group
megawedding2021@gmail.com

BRIDES WANTED

COSMOPOLITAN

MD DOCTOR(DNB–GASTRO, hindu, tamil, kongu vellalar, Dec 91, 6'1, v.fair, hastham) seeks a noble, tall, v.fair, metro–educated, MD–MS or highly qualified bride. Parents: 9342529547 / 9072118800

39 YEARS unmarried Hindu groom with 5'7" height and fair complexed, self employed civil engineer post graduate, with own residence in hyderabad, and earning of 25–30 Lakhs/ Annum looking for educated bride from a reputed family background. Contact No – 9985637279

LOOKING SUITABLE match for Engineer, unmarried, 52/ 170cm, Kerala, caste/religion no bar. M:– 9037442689

DIVORCEE

BENGALURU BASED, Software Professional, 6 ft / 1971 born – fair, Tamil, Hindu, Yadava – Male (divorced) seeks proposals from suitable, educated Hindu women (preferably) from Bengaluru. Caste no bar. Please email shankris2022@gmail.com / call +91 90085 42820 with details.

PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

LOOKING FOR a simple, caring and understanding girl from a decent Brahmin family for my son who is 34, independent and self–employed as DTP operator in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Slow learners and persons with any disability are also welcome. Contact: 9244649231

TAMIL

CHRISTIAN NADAR, 34yrs/178cms, MBBS with dip in Cardiology Private Doctor good looking lives in Nagercoil, Innocent Divorcee seeks same caste qualified Bride/ Divorcee above 28yrs. Ct: 90039 83230.

TAMIL ROMAN Catholic. Seeking a suitable bride for our son, 33 yrs, Fair, 172 cm tall, MS Aerospace, Head Of Operations, Germany. Caste No Bar. Contact: 9042607923

CHRISTIAN 41/170 B.E Software engineer, Chennai, Never married, seeks bride from elite family, caste no–bar, contact–9500188067

TAMIL

MD DOCTOR 39/180, Reddiyar. Mutual divorcee. Caste no bar. Ph 8124570336

IIM MBA Agamudayar, Mukkulathor, 97born/180cm,16L pa,Punarpoosam 2 seeks same caste Bride. 9842103232

HINDU YADAVA, Handsome, clean habits 26 /179 B.Tech working in MNC, 30 LPA, very short lived first marriage only 6 months. Father PSU officer. CNB. 7904627469

TAMIL HINDU BOY (BC). MBA. Age – 39. 1st Marriage. Very Honest & Faithful boy. Good beauty I can assure you that I have no bad habits. Full consent to be a GOOD HOUSE GROOM and a GOOD SON in a GIRL HOUSE. I will take care of my future wife like my mother. 2nd marriage is Accepted. (Caste & Religion no bar). Please Avoid brokers. Call: 91235 – 89257

60, SIMPLE, Healthy, Pretty, Decent. Seeking Good Looking Issueless Bride Caste No Bar. Ct: 7604841705

REDDIYAR (CNB) 31, Moolam, MBA Deloitte, rich – looking from Educated & Respectable Family.Ct. 9840405153

GROOM 34,BE, Good Family & Settled, Working in USA.Seeking Hindu Bride. Caste,Region & Age No Bar. Divorcee Bride also with/without child. email: vedha.880827@gmail.com; C9042021137

VISWAKARMA GROOM,SW Eng Revathi/ ME(Ph.d)31/167 /Fair/RS.6 L PA. Seeks Suitable Bride 9444247481, 8428432112

MUDALIAR, 29, BE, MBA, 176 cm, 28 Lacs P.A, Well Settled Family Seeks Bride CNB Ct. 8778514465/ 7200866346

AGE 46, DME, Hindu Yadhavar, Business, First Marriage, Looking for Degree Completed Bride. Ct: 9952065594

PVT COLLEGE Professor 53/Divorcee Vellalar Seeks Widows Age45–50, Teachers or Unemployee, True Life Partner or Life Companion Ct:8148779326

✔ **PILLAI(KARUNEEGAR)**, DOB:24–01–92, BE, Veg, Job: MNC (Software) Chennai, Annual Income: 23.5 lakhs. Seeking a suitable bride from the same or any other community. Ph: 9841784047 Email: pingme.arul@gmail.com.

61 YRS, without income seeks settled widow, physically challenged as life companion from TN/ Kerala/Karnataka only. Age & Caste No Bar. Whatsapp: 98651 90772 (Madurai)

VISHWAKARMA 40, Divorced, Slightly disabled (Foot drop) DCE Manager P Ltd, 40k. caste no bar. Seeking understanding life partner. 8015624255

HINDU 31 Years 185 cm. Currently working in Germany as a Senior Logistics Program Manager after doing MS in US. Well Settled Family. Star Hastham and BC. Seeks well Educated, Bride (Caste No Bar) from abroad or willing to move abroad for their only Son. 9840041041

MUDALIAR / Agamudayar / Thuluva Vellalar bride wanted for 29 yrs, US educated (both under and Post Grad) 1,50,000 USD, SWE in the top Corporate Employed Boy from affluent family in Chennai – 8925019776

MUDALIAR, 35, 1st marriage, MSc (Media), salary 3.6 lakh P/A + rental income from property, Punarpoosam, Educated family, seeks educated, employed brides 27 to 32 age contact 9840276814 (W)

BRAHMIN GOOD Looking Groom 39 Chennai Divorced &Well Settled Income Monthly 5 Lak Bride Wanted 8754536193

VANNIYAR 36/180, BSC, MSC, Phd., Pursuing, Professor/ Digital Marketing Specialist. 9L /PA. Revathy CNB in MBC Educated Girl Ct; 9840044473

VANNIYAKULAKSHATRIYA 43 MIE in USA Thiruvonam seeks amicable match from same community. Ct: 9444003648

WE ARE looking for an educated Hindu girl, with decent family background for our son Raghu, aged 37, 5'10, M.S Biotech, residing in Townsville, Australia, Hindu, Tamil, Yadava. Contact 9677181668 / an.vaijayanthi@gmail.com, caste no bar

SC ADIDRAVIDAR 28/B.E, Govt Job (Probationery Officer) State Bank of India 53000Pm Seeks Bride 7200067015

ARCOT MUDALIYAR 28/B.E, Central Govt Job, Section Engr (Southern Railways) 60000Pm Seeks Bride 9514173518

SAIVA PILLAI, MSC MBA 4Lakhs/ monthly, Company Owner 15 Crores property, only son 173cm Visagam, 46yr unmarried cnb. 98415 53677 (W)

TAMIL

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BRAHMIN GOUTHAMA Rohini, 26 yrs, 168 cms, B. Tech (Genetic engineering), M.Sc. Genomic Medicine (London, UK), Settled in Chennai, Affluent business family. Seeks Brahmin girl, professional, aged below 25 yrs. WhatsApp Parent: 93422 68247

MALAYALAM / Tamil Caste No bar Second Marriage 48, BA., Political Science Settled Chennai Ct: 9445776071

AGAMUDAYA MUDALIYAR, Divorced, 41 Mirugasiridam PhD TN Govt Job Rs 1.21 Lakh P/M,170cm,70kg, 7904550883

HINDU DEVENDIRA kula vellalar M.E., 29/168 Asst. Engg. in PWD seeks suitable bride 8248195168, 8667380725

AGAMUDAYA MUDALIYAR Family Seeks Match for Their Son / BE / Aug 1996 / Slim / Wheatish / 175 cm / CNB / Chennai Owns Industry. (www.vgsref.com) (www.vgsprayag.com), 9790753377

MUDALIAR 31/177, H.Some, MBBS,MS,60Lac.PA,Affluent Fmly, Seeks India/USA Bride,CNB. 7299576644,7299576666

DKV 33/173 Hastham Manager Govt. Bank seeks suitable bride from educated family. Caste No bar. 9940507235

VISWAKARMA TAMIL Veg 36/178 BE (Mech) Hastham Fair 50k pm Seeks suitable bride CNB only Veg Ct:9884352960

IITIAN 6'2 Mudaliar born in Nov 91 wkg as Techinical Lead at Hyderabad in Top MNC Sal 60 lacs seeks Bride 5' 4 Engineer,CA Doctor.Ct: 7382620365

HINDU DKV Pallan ME, 41/167, Manager, National Bank 1.2 lac pm. Seeks Bank, Govt, Teaching Staff. CELL: 99652 11259

HINDU NADAR 30, BE, 180cm, Income 3Lakhs,Workingin Kuwait Seeks Suitable Bride. KA Ramannadar 9380791999

IYER, 41 Years, Self Employed Chartered Accountant in Erode. Having own house and earns 25LPA. Right leg slightly short. He can walk and drive vehicle normally. Need Suitable Bride. Call 9994934568

IYER BRAHCHARANAM / Koundinyam / Avitam 1988 B.Com / MBA working pvt firm getting 4.5 LPA. Seeks working bride. 94431 32445.

IYENGAR VADAKALAI 34/167 Poorattathi Naithruba Kashyabam. MS BITS PILANI, MNC 2.5L Pm, Own House Coimbatore. Seeks Graduate Girl, Kalai & Subsects no bar. CT: 97890 14553, 80567 88367.

WANTED ANY Brahmin Girl for Boy M.K Srinivasakumar Age 44, 2nd Marriage No Kids, Own House Ambattur, Chennai. Subsect/ Language No Bar. Cell: 9710925815 or 9884995250

IYER KETTAI 39 BE LLB, 18L/pa own house, company all veg ok. divorcee excuse CNB. 9500456893/ 6369157055

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31 / 164cm ME. Assistant Professor Chennai Divorcee seeks suitable Bride Unmarried/ Divorcee- No issue. Naidu/ Mudaliar / Pillai / Chettiar Preferred. Contact : 94430 52596 / 94456 89306.

TELUGU

BALIJA NAIDU, 28/182 Poosam, Engr, Web Designer, 50K seeks educated bride Subcaste no bar. CT:96003 85286

KAMMAVAR NAIDU 30, 174 cm Pooram–Simmam M.S (Engg) working in USA seeks bride from same community working/studying in USA, CT. 9442026567 or kvr1956@gmail.com

BALIJA NAIDU 34yrs 175cm BE MBA. Architect and Interior designer 18L PA. Well settled family in chennai Divorced with in two months Caste no Bar 9884065632 / 9176667276.

NAIDU 27 years,182cm, Magam MD Studying in USA seek Bride from Decent family willing to study / work in USA. Contact: 96771 22110

KAMMA NAIDU, Very fair & handsome, BE, 29yrs, 5ft 9inch, SWE, MNC Chennai, 18 LPA, seeking very fair, slim & good looking bride from the same community, Call: 9841025124

BALIJA NAIDU 28/B.E., Govt Job, (AE, TNEB) 60,000Pm Seeks Bride. 9087604894

CASTE NO BAR, Divorced, 43 Years/ 178, Doctor (MBBS / MD), 50L P/A, Hyderabad, Well Settled Groom Should have a Suitable Doctor/ Engineer/Graduate/Bride, Contact : 9440124742.

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KONGU VELLALA GOUNDER, 29, 182 cms, Businessman, B.Com. Lives in Chennai. Belongs to an affluent business family with a good net worth. Looking for a like minded match. Contact: 6366448344

VANNIYA KULA KSHATRIYAR, 29, 175 cms, Analyst, MBA. Lives in Krishnagiri. Father is an affluent Businessman with a good net worth. Looking for a compatible match. Contact: 6366448344

SALIYAR, 27, 179 cms, Assistant Professor, PhD. Lives in Thanjavur. Father is a Working Professional. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: 6366448343

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PILLAI, 29, 160 cms, Marketing Professional, MBA. Lives in Chennai. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for an amiable match. Contact: 6366448344.

KONGU VELLALA GOUNDER, 26, 160 cms, Doctor, MD. Lives in Qatar. Father is a Doctor. Family is financially well off with a good net worth. Looking for a like minded and well educated match. Contact: 6366448344

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Christian & Hindu Nadar, 26/166, BE V.Fair, V.VIP,Seeks Equal Status Merchant Boys.7299525999 / 7550113468

DKV, 28/160, Revathi, B.Tech(NIT), Masters (USA) seeks well-educated, NRI groom from same community with clean habits. Preferably from USA/Canada. Contact: 94869 67791, 94430 27791.

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GROOM WANTED
Naidu, 28yrs / 5'4"/ Hastham, M.B.B.S (Doing P.G), Chennai from Educated, Cultured and Affluent Family Seeking Groom (Age 29 to 33 yrs) (Tee-Totaler) From Well Educated, Cultured and Decent Family.
Ct:98848 76246

DIVORCEE

SEEK BRIDE for Divorcee, Brahmin Iyer 38 yrs, well earning, working in Mumbai, South Indian Brahmin subsects ok. Ct: 9840853946 / 9176145760

HINDU/ SC/ AD, (Tamil), BE ME, Chief Manager, PSU Bank, 34 Tall and good looking seeks alliance for remarriage from unmarried or divorced bride. Ph: 98400 96246 / 98408 66982

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HINDU Parayar 33 BE Senior Piping Engineer, 12Lak PA, require Educated Girl from decent family. ct:9600577589

PROFESSOR, GOVT.COLLEGE, 43yrs/ 167cm, Sportsman seeks Professor/ Govt job/ Well Settled Bride Any caste & religion. Ct: 8870417228

GAVARA NAIDU, 39/180, Uthiradam, Maharam, B.E.,M.S(Eng) Maintenance Eng, MNC chennai, 15L PA, first marriage seeks Bride, Ct: 9487272897

HINDU SC Govt Doctor MBBS 43Yrs 1st Marriage Seeks Bride Doctor, Suitable Govt Official CNB 9382379832

MUDALIAR 29/175 MD Pediatrician having own Hospital seeks bride MD/MS Doctor only. Ct: 8870616802/ 8310519896

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A BG-BGE

3 students drown in Chickballapur reservoir

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Three 21-year-old students pursuing B.Pharm at a private college in Bengaluru drowned at Srinivasa Sagar reservoir in Chickballapur on Saturday.

The deceased have been identified as Imran, Radhika, and Pooja, who along with three others, had gone on a trip on bikes to Srinivasa Sagar.

Even though they did not know how to swim, the trio ventured into the water and started clicking photographs. They then slipped and drowned. The other three raised an alarm, prompting passers-by to rush to their help. A few villagers jumped into the water and pulled out Pooja and others. Pooja was alive when she was pulled out, but by the time she was taken to the hospital, it was too late, according to Chickballapur Rural police who have registered a case of unnatural death.

BMTC to run additional buses on IPL match days

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) will run additional bus services on Indian Premier League (IPL) match days in the city.

The BMTC has planned to operate additional transport services 11 p.m. onwards on April 2, 10, 17, 26, and May 21 for the benefit of those attending IPL-2023 matches at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, a release from the corporation stated.

The bus routes to be operated from the stadium are SBS-1K and SBS-13K to Kadugodi bus stand, G-2 to Sarjapur, G-3 to Electronics City, G-4 to Bannerghatta National Park, G-6 to Kengeri KHB quarters, G-7 to Janapriya Township, G-8 to Nelamangala, G-9 to Yelahanka 5th Phase, G-10 to R.K. Hegde Nagar, Yelahanka, G-11 to Bagaluru, and KBS-12HK to Hoskote.

The police have made arrangements to ensure smooth flow of traffic in the view of the IPL cricket match at Chinnaswamy stadium scheduled between 4 p.m. and 11 p.m. on Sunday.

No parking

There will be no parking on Queen's Road, M.G. Road, M.G. Road to Cubbon Road, Raj Bhavan Road, Central Street Road, Cubbon Road, St. Mark's Road, Museum Road, Kasturba Road, Ambedkar Veedi, Trinity junction, Lavelle Road, Vittal Mallya Road, and Nrupatunga Road.

Vehicles can be parked at King's Road, UB City parking lot, BMTC TTMC at Shivajinagar, Old KGID building, Sri Kanteerava stadium, and B.R.V. Grounds.

'13 years on, implementation of RTE still poor; political commitment lacking'

Representatives of SIAFFRE say Education Dept. officials think implementation of RTE means providing 25% seat reservation in pvt. schools for poor children, but there are 39 sections in the Act

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A file photo of a Government Higher Primary School at Siddapura in Bengaluru.

Thirteen years after the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, came into force, only 25.5% of its infrastructural norms, including additional classrooms, separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water, ramp, playground, and boundary wall has been achieved, according to the report of the Union Ministry of School Education and Literacy about RTE compliance in the country.

"Irrespective of political parties, all the State governments are least bothered about the implementation of the RTE Act in Karnataka. We could not see any kind of political commitment to implement RTE in the State. The Act was implemented in 2010 and the rules were formulated in 2012. There was a delay of two years to formulate rules in terms of implementation," said V.P. Niranjanaradhya, convener of the South Indian Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education (SIAFFRE).

The organisation of seven southern States and Union Territories – Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Mahatra, Puducher-Tamil Nadu, Telangana – got gether to reflect the 'Status of fundamental right to education and the way forward', on Saturday in Bengaluru.

"Since 2012, Education Department officials are thinking that implementation of the RTE means providing 25% seat reservation in private schools for poor children. But they never realise that there are 39 sections in the Act. The entire administration is busy in calling applications, selecting children, and sending them to private schools, instead of monitoring and developing the government schools," Mr. Niranjanaradhya alleged.

According to the report, Karnataka's achievement percentage is 23.6%, while the achievement of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 25.9%, Andhra Pradesh 10.7%, Goa 17.4%, Kerala 40.9%, Maharashtra 43.2%, Lakshadweep 12.2%, Puducherry 36.1%, Tamil Nadu 49.1%, and Telangana 32.0%.

Vacant posts

A total of 12,54,773 posts of teacher are vacant in government schools, and Karnataka has 1,41,358 posts of teacher vacant, which is the highest.

There are a total of 9,30,531 out-of-school children in India, and in Karnataka, the number is 5,945.

"Overall public spending on education is inadequate and far behind the resource commitment. The provision for 6% of GDP as total public spending on education is reiterated in all policy documents after the recommendation of the Education Commission (1964-66).

The current percentage of the Union Budget on education is 2.5 and the percentage of the GDP on education is as low as 0.37. The State governments are also cutting the Budget for the education sector year by year. This is the major factor in the poor implementation of the RTE," Mr. Niranjanaradhya argued.

'Muslim girls will be adversely affected by scrapping of quota under OBC category'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Muslim girls will especially be adversely affected by the Karnataka government's decision to scrap the reservation for Muslims under the category of OBCs and distribute the quota among two dominant communities – Vokkaligas and Lingayats, said K. Sharifa, a progressive thinker and writer.

At a press conference organised by the All-India Students Association (AISA), she said, "Muslim girl children are fighting against all odds to get a good education and are studying well to become IAS/KAS officers and etching out professional careers for themselves. Now, with the scrapping of the reservation and bringing them under EWS quota is educational death for these Muslim girls."

Maitreyi Krishnan, advocate, said despite scientific evaluation to provide reservations for Muslim under the OBC category, as recommended in the Havanur commission report, Chinnappa Reddy report, and subsequently the Sachar committee report, the State government has unilaterally scrapped the reservations, which distorts the reservation policy. "This move will increase inequality and vulnerability of the minorities and the oppressed alike. This is not only an issue of the Muslim community, but also an assault on the Indian Constitution," she said.

Syed Junaid from AISA said, "The recent action of the government is an attack on social justice, but is also in the continuation of the repressive and exclusionary NEP 2020, the slashing of minority scholarships of Ph.D students in Karnataka and discontinuation of Maulana Azad National Fellowship at the Centre to further marginalise the backward classes and destroy their access to equal and quality education."

49 kg of ambergris seized

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The K.S. Layout police arrested a gang from Kerala and recovered 49 kg of ambergris worth ₹15 crore. The accused are Sajir Mohammed Kunni, Saleem Salam, Charles George, 34; Viju Thangappai, 41, and Noushad Mohammed.

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Civil society groups release people's manifesto, organise 'datajam'

The manifesto, released ahead of the Assembly elections, advises political parties to have a commitment towards strengthening democracy

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

While political parties are yet to release their manifesto for the Karnataka Assembly elections, various civil society groups are putting forward what people really expect along with data analyses.

On Saturday, the Civil Society Forum released a 'people's manifesto' with the hope that political parties include the issues in their manifestos.

Historian and writer Ramachandra Guha, who presided over the event, said, "Today, our nation has become an 'election only democracy'. There is no accountability of the government to the citizens, judiciary or media between elections. ."

He lamented that political parties were not interested in having a dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs), though the CSOs came with much knowledge, expertise, and understanding of ground-level realities. "Sadly, election results were not being honoured and duly elected governments were being toppled," Mr. Guha added.

Historian and writer Ramachandra Guha (second from right) presided over the programme where the people's manifesto was released in Bengaluru on Saturday.K. MURALI KUMAR

The 'people's manifesto' has demands pertaining to administrative measures, curbing corruption, urban governance, housing, and slums, panchayat raj, agriculture, right to food, health, education, labour issues, women's right, rights of the differently abled, environment, solid waste management, and transportation. On religious freedom, the manifesto states that there is an atmosphere of fear and apprehension in the minds of the common man because of hate politics.

Hate politics

It states: "The parties standing for election and coming to power should not indulge in hate politics, divisive sectarian and casteist agenda and polarisation. There is a need for governments to denounce and take immediate action to halt, curb, and control the growth and power of vigilante groups. History should not be distorted to serve divisive agendas. Everyone's right to religious freedom to propagate and practice their faith, their right to eat food and wear clothes of their choice, and their right to do business and carry on their livelihood should be equally available to all."

Datajam analyses

On the other hand, OpenCity.in, along with Janaagraha and WRI India, on Saturday conducted a "datajam" at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore to analyse the data of Bengaluru constituencies in the context of the upcoming Assembly elections.

Karnataka Votes 2023

In a daylong event, citizens from varied backgrounds, including urban designers, GIS experts, software developers, and public health and policy enthusiasts, joined hands to analyse various datasets available for each of the 28 Assembly constituencies of Bengaluru.

The focus areas chosen by the volunteers were education, health, mobility, and civic participation.

While they found that in health, Bengaluru does fairly well in terms of primary healthcare centres with the addition of Namma Clinics, they said anganwadi centres are severely lacking in our city. "It was observed that the number of private schools in Bengaluru far exceeds that of public schools. There is an urgent need for MLAs to look at medical facilities and sanitation in public schools. We noted that schools in 22 constituencies failed to meet pupil-teacher ratios. Recruitment of teachers is an urgent need," they pointed out. A release said, "Nearly 2,900 bus stops and 63 metro stations have been analysed to understand how the Bengaluru constituencies fare in terms of access to public transport. Ten are yet to have any metro connectivity. While the inner constituencies were well connected by buses, outer constituencies need better public transport investment, both in terms of stops and frequencies. Anekal, Bengaluru South, Byatarayanapura, and Yelahanka have limited access to public transport when compared with other constituencies.

Looking at voter participation, ward committee meetings conducted and minutes uploaded, and complaints filed in IChangeMyCity (Public Eye) as well as Fix My Street, the team found that participation in elections does not correlate to how often people complain about issues with the BBMP.

"Such analysis can be useful for the MLAs who will be elected next month to know where the gaps are that need to be addressed," the release said.

EC extends postal ballot facility to COVID-19 patients

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

With COVID-19 cases surging again, the Election Commission of India (EC) has extended the option of postal ballot facility to electors who are COVID-19 positive or suspected to have been infected.

Reissuing the October 2022 COVID-19 guidelines, the ECI has said COVID-19 patients and all others who may be under isolation/quarantine will be allowed to cast their vote at the last hour of the polling day at their respective polling stations, under the supervision of health authorities. They should do so by following COVID-19-related preventive measures, the guidelines stated. Manoj Kumar Meena, Chief Electoral Officer for Karnataka, said the EC's guidelines will be enforced.

Concern over surge in COVID-19 cases ahead of polls

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

While active cases have crossed the 1,000 mark, deaths shot up to 12 in March; the current surge is driven by XBB 1.16, a mutant strain of Omicron

After over eight months, COVID-19 cases in Karnataka are on the rise again. While active cases have crossed the 1,000 mark, deaths shot up to 12 in March. The weekly test positivity rate has touched 2.84%, which is higher than the national average of 2.03%.

While doctors said the rising cases during election season is a matter of concern, the State Health Department is closely monitoring the trend. The situation is not alarming as of now as hospitalisations, which were on the rise, have reduced in the last one week, said officials. As of Saturday, the State recorded 55 hospitalisations.

A total of 15 deaths have been reported since January of which five are from Bengaluru Urban. Over half of the total active cases, which stood at 1,259 on Saturday, are from Bengaluru. Karnataka has the fourth highest active cases in the country after Kerala, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan had on March 16 written to the State to examine the situation at the micro level (district and sub-districts) and maintain focus on the implementation of necessary measures for prompt and effective management.

Wave unlikely

However, COVID-19 experts said this surge was not likely to result in a wave. V. Ravi, nodal officer for genomic confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 in Karnataka and head of Research and Development at TATA Medical and Diagnostics Ltd., said currently the XBB 1.16, a mutant strain of Omicron that can evade immunity, is the dominant strain in the country. This surge in Karnataka is also driven by XBB1.16, he said.

"Although this variant is highly transmissible, it can only result in a mild surge that requires people to exercise COVID-19-appropriate behaviour, especially in public places. As the virus mutates and its fitness improves, it will cause such fresh surges. However, the infection will be mild because of hybrid immunity in the community," Dr. Ravi said.

Advising that symptomatic people should isolate themselves for four to five days, he said people should mask up to check the spread of the infection.

Hospitalisation

State Health Commissioner Randeep D., however, said, they were tracking the trend closely and hospitalisations and the numbers had not proportionately increased. "A large proportion of the infected still are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic," he said.

Following the State's Technical Advisory Committee's recommendation, the Health Department had in mid-March asked the BBMP to conduct a clinical audit of the hospitalised patients and a death audit of all the three fatalities reported since January till then. The clinical audit has shown that COVID-19 was an incidental finding in all the three deaths, the commissioner said.

"We are also investigating if there is any coinfection of H3N2 Influenza and COVID-19 in the hospitalised patients. This is because both COVID and H3N2 share similar respiratory symptoms," the commissioner added.

IT firm booked for cheating Prisons Department

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The High Grounds police have registered a case of cheating and criminal breach of trust against a city-based IT firm for allegedly cheating the Prisons Department with substandard computers.

Based on a complaint filed by Pradeep Gunti, Superintendent of Prisons, the police on Friday registered a case against the managing director of Vagmina Enterprises from Madhavanagar.

In his complaint, Mr. Gunti said the department had called tenders for supplying 125 computers to 37 prisons across the State. The contract was given to Vagmina for quoting the lowest price and as per the deal, ₹92,81,250 was sanctioned to supply 125 desktop computers.

The fraud came to light when the audit team checked 44 computers and found out that 43 out of them were of sub-standard quality and not branded, while seven of them were defunct.

SI among three suspended

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A police sub-inspector (SI) is among the three police personnel who have been suspended for allegedly detaining a suspect in a cheating case to recover money for a commission.

Based on the allegation, Deputy Commissioner of Police, East division, Bhimashankar Guled ordered an inquiry and found the trio guilty. Based on the preliminary report, the three policemen have been suspended.

The accused Ruman Pasha, SI, and constables Lepakshappa and Lakshman, detained Kondappa, who was involved in a cheating case. He was detained illegally for more than 30 hours at the station and forced to repay the money he had allegedly cheated. The accused officials allegedly did this to receive a commission for the recovered amount.

'Dubious transactions' of 2 firms under the scanner

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Southeast cybercrime police have launched a probe against two private companies which allegedly made dubious transactions causing a loss to a cashless management company to the tune of ₹11.6 lakh.

Based on the complaint filed by Omprakash Pandey, associate director of the company, the cybercrime police have booked two private firms under section 66 C (identity theft, cheating by impersonation) and section 420 (cheating) of the IPC Act.

The cheating came to light in February when Mr. Pandey was verifying the accounts and stumbled upon two bank accounts. These two bank accounts had made transactions of ₹1 to many virtual accounts. Due to this, the company incurred a loss of ₹11.6 lakh towards transactions and payment service charges.

Suspecting something fishy about the transactions by two firms, the company sought legal action against them.

Timings
BENGALURU

SUNDAY, APR. 02		
RISE	06:15	SET 18:31
RISE	15:37	SET 03:48
MONDAY, APR. 03		
RISE	06:15	SET 18:31
RISE	16:24	SET 04:25
TUESDAY, APR. 04		
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RISE	17:11	SET 05:02

Bengaluru Weather	max	min
Tumakuru	32	25
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Bengaluru Today
35°C Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm and uneasy. Night also will be pleasant. Spell of thunderstorm is likely.

Bengaluru Tomorrow
34°C A dry weather to continue. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm. Night also will be pleasant.

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INBRIEF

BBMP sets up District Complaint Monitoring Cell

In the wake of the announcement of Assembly elections, the District Complaint Monitoring Cell (DCMC) has been set up in the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) head office.

According to the BBMP, the DCMC will work 24/7 where the public can lodge any election-related complaints. "Public can complain related to elections, including complaints related to electoral offense," the BBMP said in a release. "The public can make use of the toll-free phone number 1950 or NGRS (National Grievances Redressal System) & cVIGIL App to lodge any election-related complaints," the release stated.

BJP leader booked for storing pressure cookers at home

The Koramangala police have registered an FIR against BJP leader Anil Shetty for storing pressure cookers at his house allegedly to distribute and woo voters.

Based on a complaint by Varalakshmamma, electoral officer, the police charged Mr. Shetty under section 172 E (bribery) and 171F (Punishment for undue influence or personation at an election). The officials raided the house of Shetty based on the information and seized the 504 cookers which were stored in the basement and the second floor of the house. Mr. Shetty's supporters gathered in front of the house and protested for some time objecting to the police action, terming it politically motivated.

Meanwhile, Koramangala Block Congress Committee president Goverdhana Reddy filed a complaint with the electoral officer of the BTM Layout Assembly constituency accusing Mr. Shetty and his associate Sridhar Reddy of distributing 40,000 saris, 20,000 hot boxes, and 50,000 silver lamps to people.

From Page One

Toll hike on expressway put on hold

Prasanth Gowda, a motorist, said, "We all know that due to elections, the government has taken back the revised toll. However, we are still not happy as the existing toll is also high."

While the toll for cars was ₹135, it was set to increase to ₹165. For a same-day return journey, the charge would go up from ₹205 to ₹250. Light commercial vehicles (LCV) and mini-buses would have to pay ₹270 instead of ₹220 for a one-way trip, and ₹405 (earlier ₹330) for a return journey while buses and trucks had to pay ₹565 for a single trip and ₹850 for a same-day return journey.

On March 31, Mysuru MP Pratap Simha posted on his social media handle that he had requested the NHAI chairman, project director, and the regional officer to temporarily withhold the hike in toll, as work on the road is yet to be completed.

Toll hike on airport road

Meanwhile, those travelling to and from the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru started paying the revised toll from Saturday. The toll for commuting by car has gone up from ₹105 to ₹110, and same-day return will cost ₹170 instead of the earlier ₹160. The charge for LCV and mini-bus has been hiked to ₹170 (from ₹165) and ₹260 (from ₹245) for a same-day return trip. The toll for buses has been increased to ₹345 and for the same-day return trip it is ₹495.

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INBRIEF

Virupakshappa Madal remanded in judicial custody

BJP MLA for Channagiri, Madal Virupakshappa, who was in Lokayukta custody for the last five days, was produced before the court and remanded in judicial custody on Saturday. The court remanded him in judicial custody till April 11, while directing the Lokayukta officials to file their objections on April 6 against his bail plea. The Lokayukta officials, who are probing corruption allegations, are also probing over 100 tenders which were cleared allegedly under his directions.

A.T. Ramaswamy joins BJP in New Delhi

Senior JD(S) leader from Arkalgud, A.T. Ramaswamy, joined the BJP in New Delhi on Saturday in the presence of Union Minister Anurag Thakur. Mr. Ramaswamy had resigned as MLA on Friday and submitted his resignation to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly Secretary at the Vidhana Soudha, as Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri was away. A four-time MLA from Arkalgud in Hassan district, Mr. Ramaswamy has been vocal about his differences with the party leadership in recent days. Former Minister A. Manju, who has earlier been with the Congress and the BJP and has represented the Arkalgud constituency in the past, recently joined the JD(S) and he has already been announced as the party's candidate this time. Speaking at New Delhi, Mr. Ramaswamy said he had joined the party because he had much respect for the work of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Bandipur completes 50 years as Project Tiger Reserve, but its legacy dates back to the Maharajas

R. Krishna Kumar
MYSURU

Bandipur was among the first nine Project Tiger Reserves in the country established in 1973. M.A. SRIRAM

Bandipur completed 50 years as a Project Tiger Reserve on Saturday as it was on April 1, 1973, that the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched the flagship conservation programme to arrest the big cat's dwindling population.

There were 12 tigers in Bandipur when Project Tiger was launched, according to Ramesh Kumar, director, Bandipur Tiger Reserve. But thanks to protection measures, the number of tigers utilising the park is 173 while the number of tigers within the reserve has been pegged at 126 as per the Status of Tigers Co-predators and Prey in India, 2018, published by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, he added.

The results of the 2022 tiger estimation exercise will be released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 9 at a programme ''Commemorating 50 years of Project Tiger'' to be held in Mysuru.

But much before the Wildlife Conservation Act, 1972, was passed, the erstwhile rulers of Mysuru had realised the imperatives of conserving the flora and fauna and the Mysore Game and Fish Preservation Act was passed in 1901. The Mysore Gazetteer has recorded that several forest areas were not only preserved as game reserves but tiger blocks were identified and restrictions imposed on shooting. Initially an area spread over 35 sq miles was declared as a game sanctuary in Chamarajanagar State Forest of Mysore district in 1931 and was protected for 10 years.

However, the authorities subsequently realised that it was too small an area to constitute an ecological unit, and hence, in 1941, the Venugopal Wildlife Park was constituted extending over 800 sq km of which 82 sq miles was known as Bandipur Sanctuary within the park.

The Gazetteer notes that the boundary extended from Moyar river forming the natural southern border towards the Nilgiris, and northwards, it stretched till Gundlupet including the 1,450 m high Himavad Gopalswamy Betta.

The entire park was named after Venugopala, the deity at the temple atop the hill.

Project Tiger was launched in 1973, Bandipur was among the first nine reserves to be brought under the flagship programme and it included most areas that were already a protected area as Venugopal Wildlife Park.

It was upgraded to a national park and renamed as Bandipur and the adjacent reserve forests were included under it to extend its area to 874.20 sq km. At present, it has an area of 912.04 sq km while the adjoining Nugu Wildlife Sanctuary too has been incorporated under Bandipur, which is recognised as among the prime tiger habitats in the world.

Biosphere reserve

The Bandipur Tiger Reserve is an important component of the country's first biosphere reserve – Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and the landscape spanning Bandipur, Nagarahole, Mudumalai, and Wayanad complex is home not only to the highest number of tigers in the country – about 724 - but is also to the largest Asian Elephant population.

Officials tight-lipped about PM's visit

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

A flurry of activity has been sighted at Bandipur in anticipation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's yet another visit to poll-bound Karnataka on April 9. He is expected to visit Mysuru, which is likely to be followed by a visit to Bandipur and Mudumalai in Tamil Nadu as well.

However, Forest Department officials are tight-lipped about his itinerary. Even Deputy Commissioner of Mysuru K.V. Rajendra said recently that they have not received any "official communique".

However, other sources have said that security personnel have fanned across Gopalaswamy Betta in Bandipur and have scoured the region for almost a week. Besides, senior Forest Department officials and police have conducted inspection, including of the helipad at Gundlupet.

Mr. Modi is expected to interact with the field staff at Bandipur and also expected to drive to Mudumalai to meet Bomman and Bellie, mahouts taking care of elephants there who were featured in the documentary "The Elephant Whisperers", which won the Oscars recently.

In addition, "oral instructions" were issued to desist from accepting bookings for safari and accommodation from April 9 to 11 as apart from Prime Minister's visit, participants of the tiger conclave were also expected to make a field visit to Bandipur.

A tentative programme schedule for the event at Mysuru to be held at the KSOU auditorium from April 9 to 11 includes release of "Amrit Kal Ka Vision" for tiger conservation; release of a commemorative coin, release of tiger estimation summary report and declaration of numbers, and screening of short film 'Success of Project Tiger'.

Technical sessions are likely to be held at the Senate Bhavan of University of Mysore and topics tentatively scheduled are human wildlife conflict, conservation and sustainable development, moving beyond large carnivores, invasive species and Project Cheetah, an opportunity for conservation.

It's the season of 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' as many hop from BJP, JD(S) to Cong.

Banakar, Puttanna, Madhu Bangarappa, H. Nagesh have secured the Congress ticket to contest the polls

Nagesh Prabhu
BENGALURU

Baburao Chinchansur, U.B. Banakar, and Puttanna

With the countdown for polling in Karnataka having begun, it is the season of party hopping. More than a dozen leaders have quit the BJP and the JD(S) and joined the Congress over the past few days.

Political commentators refer to candidates hopping parties on the eve of polls as 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Rams', referring to the 1967 incident of the late politician Gaya Lal, an MLA from Haryana, flitting in and out of the Congress thrice in a few days.

MLAs and MLCs have quit their membership of Lower and Upper Houses of the Legislature, and joined the Congress. In the latest case, Kudligi BJP MLA N.Y. Gopalakrishna resigned from the Assembly membership. He is all set to join the Congress. According to sources, he had held talks with the KPCC top brass. Mr. Gopalakrishna, who won four times on Congress ticket, would likely return to his home constituency Molakalmuru.

Last week, two BJP MLCs, Puttanna and Baburao Chinchansur, quit their posts and joined the Congress. The four-time MLC Mr. Puttanna, belonging to the Vokkaliga community, has been given ticket to contest from Rajajinagar in Bengaluru. He is likely to face BJP veteran S. Suresh Kumar.

Kharge factor

The five-time MLA Mr. Chinchansur, who served as Minister in the previous Congress governments, hails from Koli community in Kalaburagi. Owing to differences with the Kharge family, he had quit the party in 2018 and joined the BJP. He seems to have played a crucial part in the defeat of AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge in 2019. The Congress is likely to give him ticket to contest from the Gurmitkal constituency. Nagangouda of the JD(S) won from here in 2018.

Another BJP leader Mohan Limbikai, former MLC, joined the Congress. Mr. Limbikai, Lingayat leader from Hubballi, was considered a close confidant of BJP veteran B.S. Yediyurappa. The Congress will field him against the BJP's likely candidate Aravind Bellad in Hubballi-Dharwad (West) constituency.

The Congress roped in former BJP MLA U.B. Banakar and offered ticket in Hirekerur. His opponent would be Agriculture Minister B.C. Patil (BJP). Another former BJP MLA from Kollegal, Nanjundaswamy, was admitted to the Congress. His name is likely to figure in the second list. Former BJP MLA V.S Patil from Yellapur too joined the grand old party. He would be pitted against Minister Shivaram Hebbar.

Upset over denial of ministerial berth in the government, BJP MLC A.H. Vishwanath has sided with the Congress. Former Minister H. Nagesh, who won as an Independent in 2018, has been given ticket to contest from Mahadevapura (SC) in Bengaluru.

A couple of days ago, S.R. Srinivas of the JD(S) joined the Congress. He was elected three times on JD(S) ticket and once as an Independent from Gubbi. Earlier, Kolar MLA K.R. Srinivas joined the Congress. He had offered his seat to former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Arsikere MLA K.M. Shivalinge Gowda has dropped enough hints of quitting the JD(S) to contest polls as the Congress nominee. Earlier, Y.S.V. Datta (JD-S) joined the Congress and he is expected to get ticket from Kadur. MLA Belli Prakash will be the BJP candidate from there.

Between brothers

Madhu Bangarappa, another former JD(S) MLA, joined the Congress and has been given ticket to contest from Sorab. His opponent will be his brother and MLA Kumara Bangarappa (BJP).

KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar has said that there is a "long list of people" willing to join the Congress and it will be "made known in stages."

Ahead of polls

Mangaluru city police conducting a route march in Ullal, Mangaluru, on Saturday to instil confidence among people ahead of the Assembly elections. ANIL KUMAR SASTRY

Deve Gowda declines to assure ticket for Bhavani from Hassan

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU/HASSAN

Karnataka Votes 2023

Amidst tussle over party ticket for Hassan Assembly constituency, JD(S) supremo is learnt to have told a delegation from the party's Hassan unit that his daughter-in-law Bhavani Revanna will not be given ticket.

Party sources said that a delegation of party workers and leaders had come to meet the former Prime Minister at his residence at Bengaluru to seek ticket for Ms. Bhavani, wife of Holenarsipur legislator H.D. Revanna, and tried to impress upon the veteran leader of her chances of winning. However, Mr. Gowda told the delegation that Ms. Bhavani would not get ticket, and that it would go to any of the party worker. He also told the delegation that Ms. Bhavani contesting would send a wrong signal to the party workers, sources said.

Over the last few weeks, the party has been divided over who has to get ticket from Hassan constituency that is currently represented by BJP legislator Preetham Gowda. While former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy is inclined to name H.P. Swaroop, son of former legislator H.S Prakash, Ms. Bhavani has been making public moves to seek ticket. The party's decision is being keenly watched as it will have a spillover in other constituencies, sources said. Meanwhile, former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy is likely to announce the second list of party candidates next week.

Mr. Revanna, had suggested Raje Gowda, a senior JD(S) functionary, as an alternative candidate. As his name was not accepted by the party leadership in Bengaluru, Mr. Revanna is said to have contacted Congress leader H.K. Mahesh to be the party's candidate in Hassan. Mr. Mahesh contested for the seat twice, in 2013 and 2018, and lost.

Farmers put forth demand

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Federation of State Farmers' Organisations has urged political parties ahead of Assembly elections to implement minimum income guarantee scheme for farmers to ensure regular incomes to them on the lines of monthly salaries being paid to government employees.

The federation made the demand while participating in an interaction programme with representatives of political parties at the Bengaluru Press Club recently to convince them to include farmer-centric measures in their poll manifesto.

Expressing concern over youth in farm sector finding it difficult to get alliances for marriage, the federation has demanded that the girls who marry farmers should get reservation in government jobs.

Seeking to push its farmer-centric agenda further in the poll manifestos of political parties, the federation told the political parties that they would have to include the agenda proposed by it in their manifestos if they want farmers to back them in the polls.

Seizures worth ₹39.384 cr. made by EC after polls were announced

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In three days after the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force in Karnataka on March 29, the Election Commission (EC) made seizures totalling ₹39.384 crore, including cash, liquor, drugs, and metals. The EC seized cash and articles worth ₹58 crore even before the elections were announced (from March 9 to 27).

After MCC came into force, cash seized was ₹7,07 crore, while liquor worth ₹5.8 lakh, narcotics worth ₹21.7 lakh, precious metals worth ₹1.9 crore, and other freebies worth ₹9.58 crore were seized, said a release from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka.

"Our Static Surveillance Teams (SSTs) have seized cash worth ₹1.39 crore in Shivamogga district, ₹30 lakh in Chickpet constituency in Bengaluru, and ₹1 crore in Kalaburagi city on March 31," said the release. The 2,040 flying squads and 2,605 SSTs removed 29,828 wall writings, 37,955 posters, and 14,413 banners from private property after the announcement of elections.

Grievance redressal

"Of the 918 calls received through Voter Helplines, 893 people have sought information, three have given feedback, six have made suggestions and 16 have registered complaints. All 918 calls have been disposed of," the release said.

Shivamogga police seize valuables worth ₹6.61 crore

The Hindu Bureau
HASSAN

The Shivamogga district administration seized valuables worth over ₹6.61 crore in the district on Friday alone. The valuables seized include ₹1.39 crore in cash and items, including sarees, meant for distribution worth over ₹5.26 crore.

Doddapete police seized sarees allegedly meant for distribution among voters. The police seized ₹1.39 crore in cash in a vehicle meant to carry cash to ATM kiosks. The personnel in the vehicle did not possess proper documents to support the cash, forcing the police to seize it.

Surprise checks

The district administration has set up check-posts across the district to ensure the effective implementation of the model code of conduct.

Deputy Commissioner R. Selvamani and other senior officers made surprise visits to check-posts to check if the officers posted were alert.

INBRIEF

Suspended MLA Raja Singh booked for 'hate speech'

The police in Hyderabad have filed a case against suspended BJP legislator T. Raja Singh for his remarks during a Rama Navami procession in the city. The incident reportedly took place around 9 p.m. on Thursday. According to police, the controversial Hindutva leader spoke about 'love jihad', achieving a 'Hindu Rashtra', his jail time, and also took a dig at leaders of a particular community.

TTD resumes issuance of Divya Darshan tokens

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Saturday resumed the issuance of Divya Darshan tokens on both its footpaths leading to the hill temple of Lord Venkateswara. The issuance of tokens was discontinued in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. With requests pouring in for the revival of the system, the TTD decided to resume it on an experimental basis. Accordingly, about 10,000 tokens would be provided at the Gali Gopuram situated halfway on the Alipiri footpath and 5,000 tokens on the Srivari Mettu trekking route from the side of Srinivasa Mangapuram every day.

Maharashtra Rythu Sangam leader, others join BRS

Maharashtra Rythu Sangam leader, Sharad Joshi Praneet, and others joined the Bharat Rashtra Samithi at the Telangana Bhavan in Hyderabad on Saturday. Welcoming them to the party, Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has alleged that the Narendra Modi government withdrew the three farm laws due to the intense pressure and unrelenting fight from the farmers, and also due to the fear of losing elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

Pinarayi, Stalin open Vaikom Satyagraha centenary fete

The 100-year-old protest highlights the need for standing together during tough times; the need to fight together will emerge again, says Kerala CM; we both share same thoughts, says T.N. CM

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

In a reflection of the growing political solidarity between the ruling dispensations of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin jointly inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the anti-caste struggle Vaikom Satyagraha on Saturday.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Vijayan said Vaikom Satyagraha highlighted the need for standing together during tough times. Tamil Nadu and Kerala had stood together throughout the struggle, he said.

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan and T.N. CM M.K. Stalin inaugurate the centenary year celebrations of Vaikom Satyagraha. VISHNU PRATHAP

"That same need to fight together will emerge again. This feeling will be escalated into a sense of great brotherhood," he said.

On the occasion, Mr. Vijayan also declared that the State government would soon erect a monument at Vaikom in memory of the satyagraha.

"Vaikom Satyagraha was a battle cry against the evil practice of 'Chaturvarnyam'. It was the series of struggles that followed the Vaikom Satyagraha that paved the way for revival movements including temple entry," he said.

Earlier, Mr. Stalin spoke about his camaraderie with the Kerala Chief Minister, stating that both shared the same thoughts. "While speaking at the venue of the 200th anniversary of the 'Thol Seelai Porattam' (Channar revolt) in Nagarcoil on March 6, I had told Mr. Vijayan about the need to convene a joint celebration on the centenary year of Vaikom Satyagraha. He agreed to it and invited me to Vaikom on that stage itself," he said.

'74 teachers, other staff booked in paper leak cases should be sacked'

Rajulapudi Srinivas
VIJAYAWADA

All the 74 teachers, working in various government and private schools, who were allegedly involved in 'malpractice' and 'paper leak' cases in Class 10 exams last year, should be terminated from their service, said Andhra Pradesh Education Minister Botcha Satyanarayana.

"It was shocking that a group of teachers, who allegedly colluded with some private education institutions, managed to take the question paper out of the examination hall and were writing the examination in a house," Mr. Satyanarayana said.

Police in Chittoor, Sri Satya Sai, Eluru and Krishna districts have registered cases against the teachers. They seized the question papers, printer, and their mobile phones in which the question papers were leaked.

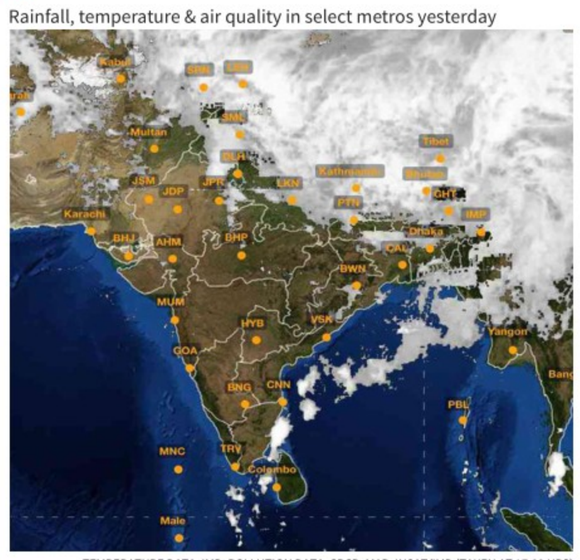
During investigation, it came to light that private school managements were allegedly paying monthly salaries to some government school teachers. As per their agreement, the accused teachers would leak the question papers and help the students score good in Class 10 exams, the Minister said.

Government had already debarred all the teachers, booked in malpractice cases, for five years from all examination duties. The teachers unions said they would not support the teachers booked in 'paper leak' cases.

"The accused teachers approached the court against the decision to remove them from exam duties, but we will file an appeal," the Minister said.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy rainfall very likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty wind (30-40 kmph) very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam and Rayalaseema

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	29.5	19.7	Kozhikode	—	35.4	26.2
Ahmedabad	—	35.5	22.5	Kurnool	—	39.7	25.3
Aizawl	—	26.2	16.0	Lucknow	16.0	28.5	18.1
Allahabad	—	31.2	17.8	Madurai	—	39.0	25.1
Bengaluru	—	34.1	23.5	Mangaluru	—	32.3	23.0
Bhopal	—	—	17.4	Mumbai	—	31.4	24.1
Bhubaneswar	25.8	33.0	19.5	Mysuru	—	36.0	21.4
Chandigarh	10.0	26.3	14.7	New Delhi	0.6	27.4	14.8
Chennai	—	34.0	27.3	Patna	1.3	—	18.7
Coimbatore	—	36.0	23.7	Port Blair	—	32.5	24.1
Dehradun	11.5	17.7	12.3	Puducherry	—	34.4	25.2
Gangtok	52	13.2	8.8	Pune	—	35.2	18.2
Goa	—	34.0	21.8	Raipur	1.0	35.2	20.0
Guwahati	0.2	25.4	21.0	Ranchi	16.2	30.4	15.8
Hubballi	—	36.0	19.0	Shillong	33.0	18.4	12.1
Hyderabad	—	35.7	23.6	Shimla	28.0	12.0	5.5
Imphal	—	23.8	16.5	Srinagar	5.0	12.3	9.1
Jaipur	7.0	29.2	15.2	Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.7	25.9
Kochi	—	31.8	26.4	Tiruchi	—	38.7	27.0
Kohima	—	16.2	10.4	Vijayawada	—	35.4	26.0
Kolkata	8.6	27.3	21.4	Visakhapatnam	—	32.0	27.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	.11	..17	.24	...119	...124	
Bengaluru	...4	..12	.18	59	89	
Chennai	...2	134	.97	.....—	46	
Delhi	.38	..35	.49	.....—	...104	
Hyderabad	.13	2	.70	83	...128	
Kolkata	...8	..—	.39	39	53	
Lucknow	.39	..19	...8	13	22	
Mumbai	...5	131	.90	...197	...154	
Pune	101	146	113	83	71	
Visakhapatnam	.17	..37	.34	29	 54	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Bhiwani, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 195 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand recorded a healthy AQI score of 24

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Ritual dance

Tough presentation: An artist performing the 'Nagaraja Thira' at the Sree Muchilottu temple at Kuthiravattom in Kozhikode on Saturday. 'Thira', like Theyyam, is a dance that is part of a religious ritual. While the person participating in Theyyam is considered god, the person taking part in 'Thira' is considered as possessed by god. K. RAGESH

RRI researchers successfully demonstrate secure, satellite-based quantum communication

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

For the first time in India, researchers at the Raman Research Institute (RRI) have successfully demonstrated secure communication established between a stationary source and a moving receiver using Quantum Key Distribution (QKD).

Prof. Urbasi Sinha, who led the team of researchers, said that this breakthrough demonstration could pave the way for ground-to-satellite-based secure quantum communication.

Urbasi Sinha briefing mediapersons at Raman Research Institute, in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

The successful experimental demonstration, which was performed at the institute in March, could also help India design and provide secure communication channels, especially for defence and strategic purposes, enhance cyber security and make online transactions safer. In order to achieve this feat, Prof. Sinha and her team at the Quantum Information and Computingl (QuIC) lab deployed an indigenously deployed Pointing, Acquisition and Tracking (PAT) system.

This PAT system assisted the ground-based source in tracking the moving receiver, in this case, a terrestrial vehicle, a few metres apart. Prof. Sinha added that the present demonstration is in continuation to the QuIC lab's February 2021 demonstration of QKD between two buildings using an atmospheric free space channel. "Just like our team achieved the first secure quantum communication between two buildings for the first time in India, we are equally delighted to be the first Indian team to achieve secure quantum communication between a stationary source and a moving platform, a critical milestone in our quest towards satellite-based quantum communications," Prof. Sinha added.

While present-day classical cryptography follows the encryption and decryption of messages, its security gets challenged by quantum computers and other revolutionary algorithmic breakthroughs.

"Security based on laws of quantum mechanics is a paradigm change from the current means of security based on mathematical hardness of problems. Quantum Key Distribution is currently the most secure means of facing any threats from algorithmic breakthroughs in classical computing as well as the advent of quantum computers," Prof. Sinha said, sharing the relevance of quantum technology in the increasing online mode of transactions. This research by Prof Sinha's team is part of Quantum Experiments using Satellite Technology (QuEST), for which RRI has been collaborating with the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) since 2017.

In Bison Hills, wedding bells fall silent as Konda Reddi tribals face 'cultural trauma'

T. Appala Naidu
POCHAVARAM

In December last year, Konda Reddi tribal girl Vala Manga's wedding was performed without missing any rituals that are associated with river Godavari.

In Pochavaram village of Tummileru gram panchayat in Andhra Pradesh's Alluri Sitarama Raju district, Ms. Manga's wedding is believed to be the last one performed on the banks of river Godavari.

Two more weddings in the village are almost finalised, but the dates are yet to be scheduled in the village that sits on the banks of Godavari in the Bison Hill Range (locally known as Papi Hill range). This is one of the villages that is set to be rehabilitated before the monsoon sets in, as part of the Resettlement and Rehabilitation exercise of the Polavaram irrigation project.

A Konda Reddi tribal habitation to be rehabilitated for the Polavaram irrigation project in Alluri Sitaramaraju district.

"We are in a cultural shock as the government told us to be prepared to be displaced before the next monsoon arrives," said Mangi Reddi, head of the Konda Reddi tribe in Pochavaram.

"Rehabilitation to a new settlement itself is a cultural shock to our tribe. Our bond with river Godavari is set to come to an end soon. We do not have any idea how to conduct our tribal rituals in the absence of the river," said Mr. Reddi.

"From birth, wedding to death, every ritual begins with a holy dip in the Godavari. For some rituals, soil and sand are brought from the banks of the river and offered to our local deities to commence the agricultural activities," Mr. Reddy told *The Hindu*.

"We have survived and tackled every transformation that was inevitable for decades as part of development. The absence of the river in our life cannot be managed anyway," says Vetla Mutyala Reddi, a tribe.

'Protected workman' status cannot be denied for merely facing disciplinary proceedings: HC

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

It is not appropriate to deny the status of a "protected workman" if merely disciplinary proceedings are initiated against him/her, said the High Court of Karnataka.

However, if it is proved in the disciplinary proceedings that the workman is guilty of allegations, or if a chargesheet is filed in a criminal case after due investigation by the police, then it has to be held that such workman is unfit to be accorded with the status of "protected workman", the court said.

Justice M.I. Arun made these observations while partly allowing the petition filed by Tata Marcopolo Motors Ltd., Dharwad. The company had questioned the directions given by the Deputy Labour Commissioner to recognise a group of workmen associated with a recognised trade union as "protected workmen" as per the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

The court pointed out that there is no provision in the ID Act or the Rules that imposes a condition for denying the benefit of the status of "protected workman" if the workman is facing disciplinary proceedings or criminal cases, but conditions were being imposed for such recognition by way of judicial pronouncements by the Supreme Court and the various High Courts. "If pendency of any disciplinary proceedings is considered sufficient to deny the status of a 'protected workman', then in such an event, the employer can easily victimise any workman," the court said while asserting that mere initiation or pendency of disciplinary proceedings cannot be a ground to deny the status of "protected workman".

"The basic object of law, recognising certain office-bearers of trade unions, as "protected workmen" is to protect them against victimisation by the employer, on account of the raising certain concerns of the employees, which are not in the interest of the employer. However, it should not result in one losing sight of the fact that it is possible for undesirable persons to get the status of protected workmen, use the said benefit for their selfish purposes," the court observed. The court has set aside the Deputy Labour Commissioner's order for granting "protected workman" status to those who were found guilty in the disciplinary proceedings and allowed the order for grant of the status to the workmen who were only facing disciplinary proceedings.

From Page One

No idols, no arms: the Pattanam mystery

Were Pattanam residents a peace-loving people who did not harbour religious and caste boundaries? The apparent absence of religious and martial remains can only tell us that religion and war did not exist as they are known today. It is safe to say there is no evidence of institutionalised religion or caste.

Driven by curiosity and the collaborative support of leading scientific institutions such as the University of Oxford and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad, Pattanam researchers considered another angle of inquiry. Given that death and customs associated with mortality are areas that see the biggest religious and caste divides today, what do the Pattanam remains convey about the death rituals of people of that time? The grave remains at the Pattanam site were confined to fragmentary skeleton remains.

The burials were of a "secondary" nature, where the dead were cremated first and the osseous remains ceremoniously buried later, taphonomic studies and minimal pathological analysis found. Large terracotta urn burials and a wide variety of stone monuments abound in the Periyar delta and basin regions, showing the ceremonious nature of the later burial practices. No artefact found indicates any religious customs.

The genotype results and ancestry analyses of samples point to South Asian, West Asian, and Mediterranean lineages. Indeed, people of widely differing backgrounds were buried the same way, strongly suggesting the prevalence of a secular ethos.

K.V. Balasubramanian and Vaidehi Herbert, researchers focusing on Sangam-era literature, connect this observation with the evidence from Sangam sources to point out that the people of the time were secular in every aspect of their highly sophisticated and pluralistic society.

Material evidence from the site strengthens the belief that Pattanam society may have lived in harmony with nature, like several indigenous societies did, and not viewed people as separate from nature. This had the positive fallout of living life in an ecologically responsible manner. At the very least, such a society did not sanction the exploitation of natural resources that is at the heart of most problems faced by the contemporary world.

Those who aspire to meaningful alternatives of community living, looking beyond a casteless society towards a closer connect with nature, might find answers in the ground beneath, as more of Muziris (Pattanam) is unearthed.

(P.J. Cherian has been the director of the Pattanam excavations since 2006, and Deepak P. has served as co-director since 2019.)

Second-highest GST collection in March

The higher compliance trends under the GST regime could also help enhance the direct tax revenues to an extent, noted Vivek Jalan, partner at consultancy firm Tax Connect Advisory.

The GST collections in March largely reflect transactions undertaken in the month of February. The revenue share between the Centre and the States during the month, after settling IGST collections, is ₹62,954 crore for the Central GST and ₹65,501 crore for the State GST, the Ministry said.

As many as 16 States and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir reported higher growth from domestic transactions during March than the national average of 14.4%, including Bihar and J&K (both at 29.4%), Karnataka (18.4%), Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Tamil Nadu (all around 15%). Among the other States, the lowest growth rate was recorded in Himachal Pradesh (8.1%) and Gujarat (8.3%). Revenues from Andhra Pradesh were up 11.3%, with Maharashtra (11.8%), Kerala (12.7%) and Telangana (13.25%) and West Bengal (13.9%) recording higher growth.

India, Malaysia move beyond dollar to settle trade in rupee

The announcement is seen as a decisive step towards de-dollarisation and an effort to safeguard Indian trade from the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine and its subsequent fallout and sanctions

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

India and Malaysia have agreed to settle trade in the Indian rupee, the Ministry of External Affairs announced on Saturday.

The announcement came against the backdrop of ongoing official efforts to safeguard Indian trade from the impact of Ukraine crisis.

The shift away from the U.S. dollar, which has been the dominant reserve currency for international trade so far, has added significance as it indicates that India is willing to take concrete steps towards de-dollarisation of its international trade.

The Union Bank of India, in a statement, said that it has become the first bank in India to operationalise this option by opening a Special Rupee Vostro Account through its "corresponding bank" in Malaysia – India International Bank of Malaysia.

"Trade between India and Malaysia can now be settled in Indian Rupee (INR) in addition to the current modes of settlement in other currencies. This follows the decision by the Reserve Bank of India in July 2022 to allow the settlement of international trade in the Indian Rupee (INR). This initiative by RBI is aimed at facilitating the growth of global trade and to support the interests of the global trading community in Indian rupees," the Ministry of External Affairs announced.

Collaborative effort: Malaysia is one of 18 countries allowed by the RBI to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (to settle payments in the rupee. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

> This mechanism will allow traders to invoice the trade in Indian rupee and achieve better pricing.
> **UNION BANK OF INDIA**

Trading in the U.S. dollar has faced growing difficulties, especially after the Russian economy was sanctioned by the Western powers following President Vladimir Putin's launch of a so-called "special military operation" against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

As a fallout of the sanctions and war-making, payments to Russia in U.S. dollars became increasingly difficult, which in turn triggered a search for solutions in national currencies and de-dollarisation worldwide.

On March 14, the government had informed the Rajya Sabha that banks from 18 countries were allowed by the RBI to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts to settle payments in the rupee. Malaysia was one of the 18 countries that figured in the statement laid out before the Rajya Sabha, by Minister of State for Finance Dr. Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad.

For better trade

"This mechanism will allow the Indian and Malaysian traders to invoice the trade in Indian rupee and therefore achieve better pricing for goods and services traded. This mechanism is expected to also benefit the traders on both sides as they can directly trade in Indian Rupee and therefore save on currency conversion spreads," a press note from the Union Bank of India informed on Saturday.

The India-Malaysia bilateral trade touched $19.4 billion during 2021-22 and Saturday's announcement is expected to help bilateral trade to overcome currency-related obstacles.

Malaysia is the third largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN region, after Singapore and Indonesia that account for $30.1 billion and $26.1 billion bilateral trade with India respectively.

Modi calls on armed forces to stay ready to deal with threats

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The PM said steps are being taken to equip the three Services with the weapons and tech.

Reviewing the operational readiness of the armed forces, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called upon the three Services to stay ready to deal with new and emerging threats, and stated that all steps are being taken to equip the armed forces with necessary weapons and technologies.

He was addressing the valedictory session of the Combined Commanders Conference in Bhopal.

The PM was briefed by the Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, about the various discussions conducted during this year's conference, a Defence Ministry statement said. Mr. Modi complimented the armed forces for their role in nation-building and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief assistance to friendly countries, it stated.

"During the final day of the session, various topics including aspects of digitisation; cybersecurity; challenges of social media; Aatmanirbharta; absorption of Agniveers and jointness were discussed," the Ministry said.

In a significant development, the scope of the conference was expanded this year to include a few multi-layered and interactive sessions with the participation of soldiers from every command of the Army, Navy and Air Force, including the Tri-Services Andaman and Nicobar Command, the statement said.

This three-day conference of combined apex-level military leadership of the country commenced on March 30 with the theme 'Ready, Resurgent, Relevant'.

"During the conference, deliberations over a varied spectrum of issues were held, including on national security and evolving a joint military vision for the future," the statement added.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had addressed and interacted with the top military brass on Friday.

This year's conference was special, wherein, inputs from the field units were sought on contemporary issues like changes in TTP (tactics, techniques, and procedures) and way forward for greater integration among the three Services, the Ministry said.

Macron invites Modi to Bastille Day parade

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

France has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Paris as a guest at the annual Bastille Day parade in July, sources confirmed, but said the visit is still under discussion.

The visit, which will add to Mr. Modi's already-packed diplomatic calendar, is likely to take place around July 14. The PM and French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to discuss a number of major agreements, including those on the Indo-Pacific region, nuclear power and defence, as the two countries mark the 25th year of their strategic partnership. While Mr. Modi has visited France a number of times, including in May 2022, this will be the first time in over a decade that an Indian Prime Minister will attend the annual military parade, since Manmohan Singh was invited as the Bastille Day parade guest in 2009.

The invitation to Mr. Modi comes after Mr. Macron's inability to travel to Delhi in March, as he was originally expected to, due to a number of domestic issues and scheduling conflicts. Mr. Macron's plans to visit India in "early 2023" had been announced by the government after a visit by a senior French Minister in October last year.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who attended the G-20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in Delhi last month, also gave an indication of the upcoming high-level meeting.

'Greater ambition'

"As we are about to celebrate this year as the 25th anniversary of the strategic partnership between India and France, now is the time to show greater ambition," Ms. Colonna had said at an event in Delhi, adding that a "quite visible" gesture could be expected. Last week, French media reported that the Elysée Presidential Palace had confirmed the invitation, hinting that a possibly large strategic agreement may also be announced at the time.

Narendra Modi

The External Affairs Ministry and the French Embassy in Delhi declined to comment on reports about the possible visit.

Diplomatic tightrope

If Mr. Modi accepts the invitation, it will add to an extremely busy international travel schedule over the next few months, as India continues to walk a tough tightrope between the western countries and Russia over the Ukraine conflict. In particular, the government is keen to ensure a smooth summit of G-20 leaders. It will like to forge a consensus over a possible joint statement by then, particularly after the failure to make a breakthrough at two G-20 ministerial meetings including the FMM, where Russia and China refused to accept language from the previous G-20 summit in Indonesia, and France threatened to walk out unless the language was retained.

In May, Mr. Modi will travel to Hiroshima to attend the G-7 outreach at the invitation of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, following which he will fly to Sydney to attend the Quad summit along with U.S. President Joseph Biden, Mr. Kishida and Australian PM Anthony Albanese. In June, Mr. Modi is likely to travel to the U.S. for a state visit, which will also be the first for an Indian PM since 2009.

At the end of June, the PM will receive leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), including Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, and Central Asian leaders. While Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is invited to the SCO summit, slated to be held between June 30 and July 2, it is still unclear whether he will attend in person.

Officials did not confirm whether Mr. Modi's visit to France in July will be a standalone visit, or will entail other neighbouring countries. In August, he is also due to attend the BRICS summit along with Mr. Putin, Mr. Xi and Brazil's President Lula, hosted by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in Durban. The PM will then host G-20 leaders on September 9 and 10 in Delhi.

(With inputs from Aroon Deep)

India-China border stable, says Chinese diplomat

Press Trust of India
KOLKATA

The earlier situation of "emergency control" at the India-China border is a matter of the past, and overall, it is stable at present, a senior Chinese diplomat said here.

Interacting with journalists on Friday evening, the Minister Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, Chen Jianjun, said the two Asian giants continued to maintain communication via diplomatic and military channels, promoting the transition of the border situation to "normalised management and control".

"The current border situation is overall stable," he said. "The Chinese side has always viewed and handled China-India relations from a strategic and long-term perspective. Although the relationship faces some difficulties, China's position has never wavered and we have been committed to pushing it back on the track of healthy and steady development," Mr. Jianjun said.

He said the two countries could draw strength from their ancient civilisations and share oriental wisdom with the world, so as to jointly maintain the stability of the global order. "In a world intertwined with changes and chaos, China and India could speak out loud for more institutional rights of developing countries. The two countries working together will bear on the future of Asia and beyond," he added.

Mr. Jianjun said China supports India in fulfilling its role during its presidency of G-20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation."China and India's bilateral trade continues to grow. Cultural, scientific, technological, educational and other people-to-people exchanges and cooperation resume in an orderly manner," he said.

Sanjay Raut claims death threat from Bishnoi gang

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday claimed he allegedly received a death threat from the Lawrence Bishnoi gang calling him "anti-Hindu". He said it threatened to kill him like Punjabi singer Sidhu Moose Wala.

Based on a complaint, the Mumbai Police on Friday took into custody a youth from Kharadi in Pune for allegedly sending the message.

Deputy Chief Minister Fadnavis, however, said the man had sent the message to Mr. Raut under the influence of alcohol and there was no *prima facie* link to Lawrence Bishnoi.

3 men discharged in UAPA case by trial court in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday discharged three men who were arrested and booked by the National Investigative Agency (NIA) for allegedly being key operatives of Indian Mujahideen (IM). Those discharged include Abdul Wahid Sidibappa, a driver who worked in Dubai and has been in jail since 2016, and Manzar Imam, a former Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) member lodged in prison since 2013. Ariz Khan, who had already been sentenced to capital punishment in the 2008 Batla House murder case, was discharged too.

Additional Sessions Judge Shailender Malik of the Patiala House Court, however, framed charges against 11 accused in the case, mostly under various sections of Unlawful Activity Prevention Act (UAPA). The trial court took almost a decade to frame charges.

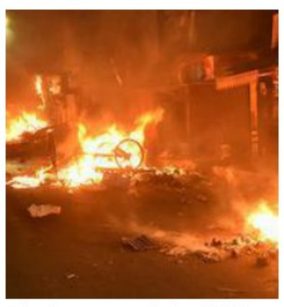
The matter pertains to a case lodged by the NIA in September 2012 against suspected members of IM and IM modules based in the country. The members, according to the agency, were conspiring to commit terror acts like bomb blasts at prominent places across India. The NIA maintained that the accused had support from their Pakistan-based operatives and aimed to wage war against India.

CID takes over probe into Howrah Ram Navami clash

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the West Bengal Police on Saturday took over the investigation in connection with violence in Howrah during a Ram Navami procession on March 30. A team of forensic experts also visited the area and collected evidence. Senior police officials said that 38 persons had been arrested so far in connection with the violence, and the situation in the area remains under control, with traffic movement normalised.

Meanwhile, Governor C.V. Ananda Bose late on Friday evening issued a strongly worded statement directing the police to be objective, strong, and fair in the matter. "There will be effective and concerted action to book the culprits and bring them before the law. Setting fire to public property, that too on the sacred Ram Navami day, is a highly provocative act and will be viewed seriously," a press statement by the Raj Bhawan said.



The Governor and the Chief Minister had a confidential discussion over the issue.

The Governor, and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, also had a "confidential discussion to review the situation". Sources said the decision to hand over the probe to the CID was taken after their discussion.

Hotbed of rioting

Over the past few years, a number of incidents of rioting have been reported in Howrah district. According to Right to Information (RTI) activist Biswanath Goswami, 59 cases of rioting were recorded in Howrah in only 18 months between 2021 and June 2022. These details were obtained on the basis of RTI queries, Mr. Goswami said, raising questions on "intelligence failure and negligence of the police authorities".

700 injured in Ram Navami festivities in Hazaribag

Press Trust of India
HAZARIBAG

Around 700 people were injured while playing with swords and sticks during Ram Navami celebrations in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district, officials said on Saturday.

The celebrations, which began around 8 p.m. on Friday, concluded on Saturday night. Braving heavy rain, 91 *akharas* took part in the centuries-old celebrations in the town's Boddom Bazar in Bada Thakur Bari area, the officials said. The celebrations, marked by well-decorated tableaux touring the length and breadth of the town, was attended by over two lakh people.

RSS chief bats for 'Akhand Bharat', says it is the truth

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday said 'Akhand Bharat' was the undisputed truth and a divided Bharat was a nightmare.

Mr. Bhagwat said the separated parts of Bharat would unite one day. The RSS chief said Pakistan was "unhappy" as it got separated from India, and it would, one day, be merged into 'Akhand Bharat'.

"I am not saying that India should attack Pakistan, but there will be a day when people will think of doing it [becoming part of Akhand Bharat]. And it will happen," he said. He was speaking at a function in Bhopal to mark the birth anniversary of freedom fighter Hemu Kalani.

He stressed that Indians had a target to rejoin all the parts of India that were divided in the past. "A broken body cannot survive, it has to be fixed... We can leave that part of India but can never forget our relation which is attached with hearts," he added.

Some people have given contract to tarnish my image, says Modi

Flagging off the Bhopal-Delhi Vande Bharat Express in the Madhya Pradesh capital, he says that while some individuals are determined to 'dig his grave', every Indian, including from the deprived sections, has become his 'security shield'

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging off the Vande Bharat Express at Rani Kamalapati station in Bhopal on Saturday. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is present. ANI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday responded to a barrage of criticism over the Adani issue and former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's disqualification, suggesting that some individuals had "handed out a contract to tarnish his image" and were determined to "dig his grave".

"There are some people in our country who are determined to do this and have been saying this publicly since 2014. They have declared their resolve to tarnish the image of Modi. For this, these people have given *supari* [contract] to different people. Some people inside the country support them, but some are working from outside as well," he said.

Mr. Modi was flagging off the Bhopal-Delhi Vande Bharat Express at the Rani Kamalapati station in Bhopal. While he did not name anyone, it is understood that his words were aimed at Opposition parties that have continuously accused him of protecting businessman Gautam Adani over the past few months. The Opposition has also targeted the government over the recent disqualification of Mr. Gandhi from Lok Sabha, and the alleged misuse of Central agencies.

'Security shield'

In his speech, Mr. Modi asserted that while "such people are somehow trying to tarnish his image", every Indian, including the deprived sections, had become his "security shield".

Meanwhile, flagging off the Vande Bharat Express, the first such train for Madhya Pradesh and the 11th in the country, the Prime Minister said new arrangements and traditions were being put in place in modern India.

He also criticised previous governments saying that those who were busy with *tushtikaran* (appeasement) could not focus on *santushtikaran* (satisfying people's needs).

Launching an attack on the Congress, he said the party believed that "one family was the first family of the country". He stated since the launch of the train was scheduled for April 1, many in the Congress thought "Modi would make everyone April Fool", but the train had actually started chugging on the same date.

Earlier, Mr. Modi expressed condolences for the people who lost their lives in the Indore stepwell disaster on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Sangeeta Sharma, vice-president of the Madhya Pradesh Congress Media Department, was reportedly detained by the police in Bhopal on Saturday. The party alleged that the detention was linked to the Prime Minister's visit.

Cong. to mount offensive with other parties against BJP's failure to conduct caste census

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Plan of action: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at the Congress's 85th plenary session in Raipur in February. ANI

In the face of a campaign by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) labelling the Congress "anti-OBC", the Opposition party is gearing up for an outreach programme, roping in other Opposition parties to mount a joint offensive against the ruling party.

The failure of the Narendra Modi government to conduct a caste census will be the rallying call of the joint offensive.

Sources said that the plan was currently at a nascent stage and that talks were going on with the leadership of the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Janata Dal(U) and others. The last caste census was done in 1931 and government policies are based on this outdated data. Since former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha on March 26, a day after he was convicted in a criminal defamation case, the BJP has fielded its rank and file to attack Mr. Gandhi, including announcing a nationwide movement from April 6 to 14 by its OBC Morcha to expose the Congress's alleged "anti-OBC" stand.

The Congress, especially Mr. Gandhi, is reluctant to engage on the caste question and insists that the BJP's narrative against them is "artificial".

In a recent interview to *The Hindu*, party general secretary K.C. Venugopal had said, "It is absolutely ludicrous for a political party that cannot conduct caste census despite persistent demand to claim love for OBCs. Of the three Congress Chief Ministers, two are from the OBC community (Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan and Bhupesh Baghel in Chhattisgarh). Our campaign in Karnataka is led by Siddaramiah, a stalwart from the OBC community. So, we don't really need to be lectured by anyone."

Countering the BJP

The party's national coordinator for SC, ST, OBC and Minorities Department, K. Raju, though refusing to comment on whether the party should have shown alacrity in countering the BJP, produced a long list of pro-OBC credentials.

"V.P. Singh government that adopted the Mandal Commission report in August 1990, collapsed soon after and it fell upon the Congress-led P.V. Narsimha Rao government to actually implement the reservation. In 2012, Congress Minister Arjun Singh introduced OBC reservation in higher education institutions – this was Mandal 2.0," he told *The Hindu*.

On the other hand, he said, the BJP's record on pro-OBC policies has been dismal. "They have failed to accede to demand to have a Ministry for OBC welfare. As on date, none of the secretary-level officers in the government are from the OBC community.This shows their sincerity," Mr. Raju added.

But within the party, many OBC leaders feel that the party has been far too slow to rebut the BJP. The Congress, they feel, failed to bat on offensive even after the party in its recent plenary at Raipur passed resolution demanding a caste census.

Rajasthan govt. to appeal against Jaipur blast verdict

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

The Congress government in Rajasthan has decided to move an appeal in the Supreme Court against the High Court's judgment acquitting all the accused in the 2008 Jaipur serial blasts case.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that a special leave petition would be filed in the Supreme Court to get the "harshest punishment" to the accused. "The State government will ensure justice to the victims of blasts by engaging the best lawyers," Mr. Gehlot said. The State government has also decided to terminate the services of Additional Advocate-General Rajendra Yadav, who was appointed to appear in the case.

INBRIEF

Navjot Singh Sidhu released from prison in Patiala

Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu was on Saturday released from the Patiala prison in Punjab, after he served a one-year sentence in a 1988 road rage death case. Soon after his release, the Congress leader hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government at the Centre, alleging that every institution in the country was facing threat and that democracy was being muzzled and "has been chained." Debate and dissent, which are essence of the democracy, are being throttled, Mr. Sidhu said. The Congress leader added that Punjab was the country's shield, but there was a conspiracy being hatched to break the shield by attempting to impose President's Rule in the State.

Akhilesh to unveil statue of BSP's founder in Rae Bareli

In an attempt at reaching out to the numerically significant Dalit community, Samajwadi Party (SP) national president Akhilesh Yadav is likely to unveil a statue of Bahujan Samaj Party founder and Dalit leader Kanshi Ram at a function in Rae Bareli on Monday. Mr. Yadav will also address a public meeting where he is likely to focus on the party's agenda of Other Backward Classes-Dalit unity, which gained momentum after 2022 Vidhan Sabha polls. It is interesting to note that the main organiser of the Rae Bareli function is Swami Prasad Maurya, a key OBC leader of the SP, who had a long stint in the BSP. The visit also holds significance as Mr. Yadav has hinted at putting up a candidate from adjoining Amethi, traditionally a Congress bastion, in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Rae Bareli is also a Congress pocket borough represented by Sonia Gandhi.

Shah visit to Bihar's Sasaram cancelled due to tensions

Union Minister Amit Shah's visit to Sasaram in Rohtas district on Sunday has been cancelled following the imposition of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in view of the communal tensions on March 31 during Ram Navmi, according to BJP State president Samrat Choudhary. The party had organised a programme in Sasaram to mark the birth anniversary of Samrat Ashok. Mr. Shah's visit to Nawada on Sunday, however, has not been cancelled. Mr. Choudhary blamed Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for the deteriorating law and order in Bihar. "Nitish Kumar*ji* cannot run the State any more. It is not only Sasaram, even Biharsharif of Nalanda district is in the grip of communal tension," he said. Mr. Kumar issued a probe order with regard to communal tension. Meanwhile, speaking to *The Hindu*, Rohtas District Magistrate Dharmendra Kumar said that Section 144 was never imposed in Sasaram. "I never ordered the imposition of Section 144," Mr. Kumar said.

Defence exports have touched all-time high of ₹15,920 cr.: Rajnath

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

According to Defence Ministry, this is almost ₹3,000 crore more than previous financial year's

The country's defence exports touched an all-time high of ₹15,920 crore in the financial year 2022-23, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday. This is almost ₹3,000 crore more than the previous financial year's and a rise of over 10 times since 2016-17, the Defence Ministry said.

"It is a remarkable achievement for the country," he said on Twitter.

India is now exporting to over 85 countries, the Ministry said in a statement. "Indian industry has shown its capability of design and development to the world, with 100 firms exporting defence products at present. The rising defence exports and participation of 104 countries in Aero India 2023 are proof of India's growing defence manufacturing capabilities," it stated.

The Ministry said India exports major platforms such as Dornier-228, 155 mm Advanced Towed Artillery Guns (ATAGs), BrahMos missiles, Akash surface-to-air missiles, radars, simulators, mine-protected vehicles, armoured vehicles, Pinaka rocket launch systems, ammunition, thermal imagers, body armour and others. "There is growing global demand of Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Tejas, Light Combat Helicopters, aircraft carrier, Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul activities," it claimed.

In a tweet, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the achievement is a clear manifestation of India's talent and the enthusiasm towards 'Make in India'. "Our government will keep supporting efforts to make India a defence production hub," he added.

Modi govt. is weakening laws on conservation of forests and wildlife, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Jairam Ramesh

The Congress on Saturday said that the Narendra Modi government was weakening laws on the protection of forests and wildlife for the sake of ease of doing business.

Addressing a press conference, Congress general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh, who was the Environment and Forest Minister in the Manmohan Singh government, referred to the proposed amendment to the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 as an example of diluting laws that have contributed to gains in protecting India's wildlife and natural resources. He was speaking on the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger launched by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and also in commemoration of five decades of the Chipko movement.

"This government is deliberately weakening the laws and institutions working towards forest conservation and environment. We are against this liberalisation and the laws should be strictly enforced and institutions should be strengthened while dealing with today's biggest challenge of changes in the environment," Mr. Ramesh said.

Joint Committee

Mr. Ramesh said the Bill on the proposed amendment had been referred to a Joint Select Committee and not the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forest, that he heads, because the government simply wanted an endorsement of its proposal.

Earlier, the Congress leader had written to Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar to register his protest against the decision to send the Bill to a Joint Committee, and called the move a "devaluation and denigration" of Standing Committees.

Hitting back at Mr. Ramesh, Union Minister for Environment and Forests Bhupendra Yadav tweeted, "Jairam Ramesh says referring the Forest Conservation Amendment Bill to a Joint Committee is 'devaluation and denigration' of processes. Will serve him well to take a hard look at how many Bills introduced in Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha were sent by Cong govts to the Joint Committee."

The Minister also shared details of how many times previous Congress governments had sent Bills to such Joint Committees.

No. 1/23-24

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For details and the application proforma, please visit our website **www.cict.in**

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No:-MBF/AMRUT-RWB/2022-23/1369 Date:10-03-2023

Notice inviting online bids for Rejuvenation of Water Bodies & Green Space work

NIB Code :- DLB2223A9935, Bid Title / (UBN) - DLB2223WSOB32343

Municipal Board Fatehpur (sikar) invites online unconditional bids on behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan through e-procurement portal **http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in** from eligible bidders in accordance with the RTPPAct2012 and RTPPRules2013, amended up to date and under national Competitive Bidding with Single Stage –two envelope Bidding procedure for following works. Tender Fee and Bid Security fee must be submitted on Nagar palika Account No **915010027964897** IFSC UTIB0002348 Axis Bank Ltd. Fatehpur and UTR Number Received from Bank written on submitted bid only Egrass Platform with MD RISL Fee On Account **(8658-00-102-16-01)** Local Bodies Department, Office Name/Code 33764 Municipal Board Fatehpur and all Challan will be upload on online bid.

Bid Issue Date	10-03-2023
Online Bid Submission Start Date	16-03-2023 Time 6:00 PM
Online Bid Submission end Date	05-04-2023 Time 6:00 PM
Technical Bid Opening Date	06-04-2023 Time 3:00 PM

S. No	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (Rs. In Lacs.)	Bid Security(2%) of Estimated Cost (in Lac.)	Tender Fee		Period Of completion
				Tender Fee pay to EO, Municipal Board, Fatehpur Shekhawati	Tender & Processing Fee pay to M.D. RISL, Jaipur	
1	Rejuvenation of Water Bodies & Green Space work near DholiSatti with 5 Years O&M Fatehpur Shekhawati.	308.49	6.17	5000/-	1500/-	12 Months

1. Detailed NIT & Bid Documents can be seen at the websites **sppp.raj.nic.in** & **http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in** and may be downloaded free of cost from http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in
2. Any subsequent addendum/corrigendum shall be published only at the websites **sppp.raj.nic.in** & **http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in**.
3. Bid Security & Tender Fee Payable to Executive officer Municipal Board Fatehpur Shekhawati (Sikar) & Processing Fee Payable to M.D. R.I.S.L. at Jaipur.
4. Technical sanction letter ref. no. 398 dated 16.02.2023 the following conditions are consider intender.
5. It including New Rules75A and notification on dated 22oct. 2021.
6. The work shall be executed strictly as per the guideline of **AMRUT2.0** after execution of the work, the benefits shall be delivered to citizen of city.

Raj.Samwad/C/22/17183 **Chairman** **Executive Office**

INBRIEF

Pradhan's visit to boundary village in Odisha triggers row

Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan visited Phatsineru, a village at Kotia gram panchayat in Koraput district to celebrate Odisha's Foundation Day on Saturday, escalating Opposition charge that the Biju Janata Dal government has utterly failed to protect the State's jurisdictional integrity. Both Odisha and Andhra Pradesh governments have been claiming their jurisdictional authority over Kotia, which comprises 21 villages, for the past five decades. The visit of Mr. Pradhan assumes significance as the Naveen Patnaik government has been constantly drawing flak for not being able to protect the villages.

NIA nabs two persons in West Bengal detonator seizure case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday arrested two persons in connection with the seizure of a huge cache of electric detonators in Birbhum district of West Bengal in June 2022. The agency had earlier arrested another accused, Rintu Sk., in connection with the case. The two accused arrested from Raniganj were identified as Merazuddin Ali Khan, a resident of Bokaro and Mir Md. Nuruzzaman, a native of Birbhum. "While Mir Md. Nuruzzaman had supplied 27,000 kg of ammonium nitrate to Rintu Sk., Merazuddin Ali Khan had supplied electric detonators and gelatine sticks to Rintu Sk.," a press statement by NIA said on Saturday.

Bhutanese King to meet PM, President on 3-day India visit

Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck will pay a three-day visit to India beginning Monday to expand the bilateral ties especially in the sphere of economic and development cooperation. The King will hold talks with President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr. Wangchuck will be accompanied by Tandi Dorji, Bhutanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said announcing the visit. It said the visit of the King is in keeping with the long-standing tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries. PTI

Same-sex marriages attack on family system: Muslim body

Opposing petitions seeking validation of same-sex marriages, Muslim body Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind has moved the Supreme Court saying they are an attack on the family system and in complete contravention of all personal laws. Seeking intervention in the batch of petitions pending before the top court, the organisation also cited the Hindu traditions, saying the aim of marriage among Hindus is not merely physical pleasure or procreation but spiritual advancement. "This concept of same-sex marriage goes to attack the family system rather than making a family through this process," the Jamiat said. PTI

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	7	6	2	9	5	4	3	1
4	5	9	1	3	7	6	2	8
3	1	2	6	4	8	5	7	9
6	2	1	9	5	4	7	8	3
5	4	7	8	2	3	9	1	6
9	3	8	7	6	1	2	5	4
1	6	4	5	8	2	3	9	7
7	9	5	3	1	6	8	4	2
2	8	3	4	7	9	1	6	5

Poor testing of pashmina shawls still poses a problem

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries (KCCI), a Valley-based traders' body, has raised the issue of confiscation and poor testing of pashmina shawls with the Union Minister for Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav.

According to the body, there has been a growing seizure of shawl consignments by the Customs Department at international airports in the country.

"Exports of Kashmiri shawls will touch anywhere between ₹1,000 crore and ₹2,000 crore mark if the hurdles are removed. We apprised the Minister of the centuries-old cottage craft that has provided employment to tens of thousands of male and female artisans. We also discussed the product demand within and outside the country," Javid Ahmad Tenga, president of the KCCI, said. The hurdles Mr. Tenga talks about begin at the airport. Basic microscopes may detect banned shahtoosh guard hair (wool from the chiru goat or Tibetan antelope) in what are classified as pashmina shawls (wool from the pashmina goat). Pashmina wool has a thread width of 13 to 16 microns, while shahtoosh has a width below 11 microns (the diameter of human hair is 70 micron).

Going south: Exports of the shawl has dipped from ₹305 crore in 2018-19 to ₹272 crore in 2019-2020, ₹172 crore in 2020-2021, and ₹166 crore in 2021-2022. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Testing delays

"The shawl is then sent for further testing to laboratories, either in Dehradun or Kolkata. We have to wait for months together to get a report. Many times, the reports are inconclusive. By the time, traders are questioned and even CBI raids are carried out on artisans involved in the weaving of these pashmina shawls," Tariq Dar, a Kashmiri exporter who owns the label Pashmkaar, said.

Mr. Tenga said the Ministry has promised to set up a DNA testing lab in Gurugram. "We are hopeful this will help in the fast processing of consignments at the Customs Department," he added. The KCCI also demanded installation of the latest pashmina testing machine in Srinagar as well in Delhi for simplification of Customs clearance. The KCCI stressed the need for DNA testing and not basic microscopic testing.

According to official figures of the Kashmir Handicrafts Department, against ₹305 crore of shawl exports in 2018-19, before the Centre ended J&K's special constitutional position, exports dipped to ₹272 crore in 2019-20, to ₹172 crore in 2020-21, to ₹166 crore in 2021-22.

The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) says that 537 illegal imports of *shahtoosh* scarves have been spotted by Switzerland authorities in the past five years, pointing at the continuous illegal trade.

Shahtoosh ban

Manufacturing of shahtoosh shawls was stopped in Kashmir since the ban was imposed in 2002 by the J&K government. The move came after the chiru population showed a downward spiral in the 1980s. A senior official of the WTI put the number of chiru in 2003 between 200-500 in the trans-Himalayan deserts of Ladakh. However, the population of chiru has been stabilising.

Traders are aware that shawls with shahtoosh fibre could be confiscated overseas for being a banned item and attract stricter actions than in India. They say only a miniscule section may be involved in illegal trade. However, contamination is a reality that the government needs to look into.

Mahmood Shah, director of the Handicrafts and Handloom Department in Kashmir, said contamination is a "high possibility" and needs to be looked into from a scientific perspective. "Both pashmina goat and chiru are inhabitants of Ladakh's high-altitude Changthang belt. There is a possibility of herders mixing pashmina and shahtoosh fibre, when these animals shed their coats seasonally. Two, once traders purchase pashmina wool with shahtoosh contamination for spinning, artisans can't make out the difference. So, contamination at source is a high probability," Mr. Shah said.

Mercury to soar above normal; more heatwave days in April-June: IMD

Bureau says most parts of India, barring parts of northwest and peninsula, to swelter; significantly higher number of heatwave days have been predicted over parts of several northern States

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Dog days ahead: India logged its hottest February this year since record-keeping began in 1901. AFP

Most of India, barring parts of the northwest and peninsular regions, is expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures from April to June, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday.

The agency said above-normal heatwave days are predicted in most parts of central, east and northwest India during this period. "During the 2023 hot weather season [April to June], most parts of the country are expected to experience above-normal maximum temperatures, except for south peninsular India and some parts of northwest India where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely," the IMD said.

"A significantly higher number of heatwave days are predicted over parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana," IMD Director-General Mrutyunjay Mahapatra said in a virtual press conference.

India logged its hottest February this year since record-keeping began in 1901, according to the IMD. However, above-normal rainfall (37.6 mm against a normal of 29.9 mm) due to seven western disturbances kept temperatures in check in March.

The IMD said normal to above-normal minimum temperatures are very likely over most parts of the country, barring some areas in northeast and northwest India and isolated pockets of the peninsular region.

Last month, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) said a review of 37 heat action plans in India shows most of them do not explicitly carry out vulnerability assessments, leaving the authorities with little data on where to direct their scarce resources.

Normal showers

The weather bureau said India is expected to see normal rainfall in April. Normal to above-normal precipitation is expected over most parts of northwest, central and peninsular region, while below-normal rain is predicted in east and northeast India.

La Nina conditions, which favour the monsoon, have weakened, according to the IMD.

"Forecast indicates ENSO neutral conditions are likely from April to June. A transition to El Niño is favoured by July-September, with chances of El Niño increasing through the fall," Mr. Mahapatra said. El Niño is associated with the weakening of monsoon winds and less rainfall in India.

'India-Romania pact on defence to help in better cooperation'

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Simona Cojocaru

The defence cooperation agreement signed between India and Romania earlier this week will enhance collaboration through the exchange of expertise and knowledge on subjects of mutual interest including co-development and co-production of military hardware, says Simona Cojocaru, State Secretary and Chief of the Department for Defence Policy, Planning and International Relations of Romania.

"The agreement will promote cooperation in the field of defence between our States. Furthermore, this agreement will open up enormous opportunities in sectors such as defence medicine, scientific research, cyber defence, technology and research and development," Ms. Cojocaru told *The Hindu* on her visit earlier this week.

Deepening ties

During her visit, she held discussions with her Indian counterpart, Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane.

She said the talks covered a wide gamut of issues, including the "security situation in the Black Sea region and in the Indo-Pacific region and cooperation in the multilateral framework".

"We have also discussed about the perspectives for the development of bilateral cooperation on matters of interest such as the exchange of experience in cyber defence, training and education, communications and informatics, military medicine, scientific research in the field of defence policy and military history, as well as in the technical-military field."

Ms. Cojocaru said that "India represents an important partner for Romania in the Indo-Pacific region" and the EU Indo-Pacific strategy represents an opportunity to advance the cooperation between the EU and India. She said the road map to 2025 of the 'EU-India Strategic Partnership' and the commitments taken at the EU-India Leaders' Meeting in May 2021 provide the right framework to take EU-India cooperation forward.

Undersea cable interests telcos, but is yet to solve Andaman's struggle with poor Internet

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

A file photo of the work on an undersea cable between Andaman and Nicobar and Chennai, on the Pattinampakkam beach.

The undersea cable between the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Chennai, connecting the Union Territory to global Internet, has seen a reasonable level of interest from telecom operators, which have to buy bandwidth on the system to be able to serve islanders on mobile and fixed line connections with fast Web access.

According to information provided to *The Hindu* by the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), the BSNL alone has been allotted 40 GBPS in bandwidth in the largest segment of the 2,300-km-long cable, the one between Chennai and Port Blair.

Airtel has bought 20 GBPS, and an additional 4.625 GBPS in bandwidth on the smaller parts of the cable, between Port Blair and islands such as Car Nicobar, Campbell Bay, Long Island, and Rangat.

The Chennai-Andaman & Nicobar Islands (CANI) cable was inaugurated in August 2020, and soon after, islanders with wired home broadband and mobile connections in Port Blair, the capital, saw their speeds improve dramatically.

Mixed response

Nirman Lall, 39, a resident of Port Blair, said over a phone call, "Previously, I was paying ₹12,000 to ₹15,000 [for Internet] during the main [tourist] season... Now, I am paying 10% of what I used to pay for 10 times the speed."

However, outside Port Blair, the experience of Internet access remains mixed. "As you move away from the city, [Internet] lacks stability, as in some places it's good, and in other places it's weak or nil," Mohammed Irfaan, a dental surgeon from Phoenix Bay, at the heart of Port Blair, said.

The official data – which indicates that only two telcos have bought a small amount of bandwidth between the capital and other islands – reflects this inequality.

Notably, the BSNL, which oversaw CANI's laying, does not appear to have updated its home broadband speeds to reflect the vast bandwidth it now has access to.

Tariffs listed on the BSNL Andaman & Nicobar Circle's website indicate that they exclude streaming subscriptions offered in other parts of the country, and only run up to 10 MBPS. Only 93 of its wireless base stations have 4G capability, with most only delivering 2G and 3G bandwidth.

"Even with the introduction of CANI, they [BSNL] could not provide the service adequately," Dr. Irfaan said, adding he had switched to Airtel at home.

Overall, Dr. Irfaan said, there was still much left to be desired. "Even after three years of [CANI's] launch, the services are not at a par to the States of mainland India," he said.

Northeast to have projects worth ₹1.76 lakh cr.: Shah

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The northeast will have functional connectivity projects worth ₹1.76 lakh crore by 2025, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said at Aizawl on Saturday.

The most significant of these projects is the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project India has undertaken in Myanmar, he said after inaugurating and laying the foundation stones of 11 projects worth ₹2,500 crore in Mizoram. The Kaladan project connects southern Mizoram to the Sittwe port in Myanmar. He said the budgetary allocation under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region has been increased by 276%.

JERUSALEM

Israeli police fatally shoot man at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque

AFP

The Israeli Police shot dead a man who they alleged tried to snatch an officer's gun at an entrance to a Jerusalem holy site Al-Aqsa Mosque on Saturday. Palestinian worshippers at the site had a different account, saying that police shot the man at least 10 times after he tried to prevent them from harassing a woman. AP

TORONTO

Indians among eight migrants found dead near Canada border

AP

The Canadian Police said they recovered the bodies of two more migrants who drowned in the St. Lawrence river while trying to enter the U.S. illegally, taking the toll to eight, including members of an Indian family. The bodies were found on Friday in a marsh on the riverbank near Akwesasne. One other person is still missing. PTI

JALALABAD

Taliban shut down radio station run by women for playing music

AP

A women-run radio station in Afghanistan's northeast has been shut down for playing music during the holy month of Ramzan, a Taliban official said on Saturday. Sadai Banowan, which means women's voice in Dari, is Afghanistan's only women-run station and started 10 years ago. It has eight staff, six of them women. AP

WYNNE

At least 18 killed after tornadoes batter U.S. Midwest and South

AP

Storms that dropped possibly dozens of tornadoes killed at least 18 people across the South and Midwest of U.S., tearing a path through the Arkansas. Other deaths were reported in Alabama, Illinois and Mississippi, along with one near Little Rock, where the mayor said over 2,000 buildings were in a tornado's path. AP

Trump 'shocked', but 'ready to fight' charges against him

The leader is to be booked, fingerprinted and have a mugshot taken at a Manhattan courthouse on Tuesday before appearing before a judge as the first former U.S. President to face criminal charges

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Donald Trump's legal team went on the offensive on Friday following his historic indictment, vowing the former President would never seek a plea deal and was ready "to fight" all charges. 76-year-old Trump, who is hoping to recapture the White House in 2024, chimed in with attacks on the prosecutors who brought the charges against him and the judge expected to hear the case.

"ELECTION INTERFERENCE, KANGAROO COURT!" Mr. Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social, adding that Juan Manuel Marchal, the judge who may preside over an eventual trial, "hates me".

Mr. Trump is to be booked, fingerprinted and will have a mugshot taken at a Manhattan courthouse on Tuesday afternoon before appearing before a judge as the first ever former American President to face criminal charges.

Standing by Trump: A woman waves a flag in support of former U.S. President Donald Trump in Palm Beach on Saturday. AP

"The (former) President will not be put in handcuffs," said Joe Tacopina, one of Mr. Trump's attorneys, adding that he does not believe prosecutors will "allow this to become a circus."

Mr. Tacopina said the hush-money case being brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg against Mr, Trump faces "substantial legal challenges" and the former President would plead not guilty. There is "zero" chance Mr. Trump would accept a plea deal, he told NBC's Today show. "It's not going to happen. There's no crime."

Mr. Trump, who is currently at his palatial Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, was initially "shocked" at the indictment, his attorney said, but "he's now in the posture that he's ready to fight this".

Mr. Trump's pending arrest throws a political grenade into next year's White House race and President Joe Biden sidestepped questions from reporters about the indictment of the Republican.

A New York grand jury indicted Mr. Trump on Thursday over a $130,000 hush-money payment made to a porn star to buy her silence during his 2016 campaign. He has denied any wrongdoing and accused Mr. Bragg, a Democrat, of waging a "political witch-hunt" to derail his new White House bid.

In predicting his indictment, Mr. Trump called for protests and warned it could lead to "potential death and destruction" for the country. In a statement, the ex-President said he had already raised $4 million for his 2024 presidential campaign following news of the indictment.

Extra security has been deployed for days around the courthouse where Mr. Trump is to be booked and arraigned, with the New York Police Department saying on Friday there were "no current credible threats" to the city.

Biden tells Russia to release U.S. reporter

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden on Friday called for Russia to release *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is being held on espionage charges, while rebuffing a call from the paper's editorial board to expel Russian journalists from the United States.

Asked by White House reporters what his message was to Russia regarding Mr. Gershkovich, a U.S. citizen, Mr. Biden said: "Let him go." The *Wall Street Journal*'s board of opinion editors called in a piece published on Thursday afternoon for the expulsion of Russia's Ambassador to the United States, and "all Russian journalists working here".

"The timing of the arrest looks like a calculated provocation to embarrass the US and intimidate the foreign press still working in Russia," it added.

The Journal's editor in chief, Emma Tucker, sent a note to the newspaper's staff on Friday, saying that "we will carry on doing everything in our power to secure Evan's release".

Pakistan posts highest-ever annual inflation; stampedes for food, aid kill at least 16

Reuters
ISLAMABAD

Consumer price inflation in Pakistan jumped to a record 35.37% in March from a year earlier, the statistics bureau said on Saturday, as at least 16 people were killed in stampedes for food aid.

The March inflation number eclipsed February's 31.5%, the bureau said, as food, beverage and transport prices surged up to 50% year-on-year.

Thousands of people have gathered at flour distribution centres set up across the country, some as part of a government-backed programme to ease the impact of inflation.

At least 16 people, including five women and three children, have been killed in stampedes at such centres in recent days, police and officials have said. Thousands of bags of flour have also been looted from trucks and distribution points, according to official records.

The Pakistani police on Saturday arrested eight people in the southern port city of Karachi after a stampede killed 12 people at a Ramzan food and cash distribution point a day earlier.

A woman carries her child on her shoulder and a free flour bag in Islamabad. AFP

Free food

Hundreds of women and children rushed to collect free food and cash outside a factory in an industrial area of the city on Friday. Business owners during the Islamic holy month often hand out cash and food, especially to the poor.

Police say they issued and publicized an order saying that any person or organization planning to distribute food or other things to the poor must inform authorities in advance. The chief minister of Sindh province, where Karachi is located, announced compensation for people injured in the stampede and relatives of the victims.

On Saturday, police fired tear gas at crowds who gathered to receive free flour bags in the northwestern city of Peshawar.

Annual food inflation in March was at 47.1% and 50.2% for urban and rural areas respectively, the bureau said. Core inflation, which strips out food and energy, stood at 18.6% in urban areas and 23.1% in rural areas.

The South Asian nation has been in economic turmoil for months with an acute balance of payments crisis while talks with the IMF to secure $1.1 billion funding as part of $6.5 billion bailout agreed in 2019 have not yet yielded fruit.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have fallen to cover barely four weeks of imports. A monthly economic outlook report issued by the Finance Ministry on Friday projected inflation would remain elevated.

Post-U.S. visit, Taiwan President arrives in Central America

Agence France-Presse
GUATEMALA CITY

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen arrived in Guatemala on Friday on a visit to shore up ties with dwindling allies following a trip to the U.S. that angered China. Ms. Tsai's visit to Guatemala and its Central American neighbour Belize comes after Honduras became the latest country to cut diplomatic ties with Taipei in favour of Beijing.

The President had stopped in New York on the way, and has announced plans to meet U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California on her return leg.

Ms. Tsai arrived in Guatemala on Friday afternoon, where she was received with military honours and met by Foreign Minister Mario Bucaro. She held a brief meeting with Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, whose government has declared Taiwan "the only and true China," before the two staged a joint press conference. "The ties between Guatemala and Taiwan are unbreakable," Mr. Giammattei said.

Tsai Ing-wen

Iran's Chief Justice threatens to punish women without veils

Reuters
TEHRAN

Faced with an increasing number of women defying the compulsory dress code, Iran's judiciary chief has threatened to prosecute "without mercy" women who appear in public without veils, Iranian media reported on Saturday.

Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei's warning comes on the heels of an Interior Ministry statement on Thursday that reinforced the government's mandatory hijab law.

"Unveiling is tantamount to enmity with (our) values," Mr. Ejei was quoted as saying by several news sites. Those "who commit such anomalous acts will be punished" and will be "prosecuted without mercy," he said.

Mr. Ejei, Iran's Chief Justice, said law enforcement officers were "obliged to refer obvious crimes and any kind of abnormality that is against the religious law and occurs in public to judicial authorities".

A growing number of Iranian women have been ditching their veils since the death of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in the custody of the morality police in last September. Mahsa Amini had been detained for allegedly violating the hijab rule.

Government forces violently put down months of nationwide revolt unleashed by her death.

'Still alive', says Pope as he leaves hospital

Associated Press
ROME

Pope Francis was discharged on Saturday from the Rome hospital where he was treated for bronchitis, quipping to journalists before being driven away: "I'm still alive."

Pope Francis, 86, was hospitalised on Wednesday at Gemelli Polyclinic after reportedly having breathing difficulties following his weekly public audience. The pontiff was treated with antibiotics administered intravenously, the Vatican said.

Before departing, he had an emotional moment with a Rome couple whose five-year-old daughter died on Friday night at the hospital.

The Pope seemed eager to linger with well-wishers. When a boy showed him his arm cast, the Pope made a gesture as if to ask "Do you have a pen?"

A papal aide handed one, and the Pope autographed the cast.

'Chest pain'

The pontiff answered in a voice that was close to a whisper when reporters peppered him with questions, indicating he did feel chest pain, a symptom that convinced his medical staff to take him to the hospital on Wednesday.

Pope Francis sat in the front seat of the white car that drove him away from Gemelli Polyclinic. But instead of heading straight home, his motorcade sped right past Vatican City, according to an AP photographer positioned outside the walled city-state.

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : T No. 117 to 118/2022-23/SE/Q, **AMRUT KIIFB** - Construction of weir across Kallada river at Njankadavu, construction of Transformer building approach road retaining wall etc. at Njankadavu and Vasoorichira. **EMD :** Rs. 500000, 200000, **Tender Fee :** Rs. 16540+2978, 11025+1985, **Last Date for Submitting Tender :** 25-04-2023, 02:00 pm, **Phone :** 04742745293.
Website : **www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in**
Superintending Engineer
KWA-JB-GL-6-2016-2022-23 PH Circle, Kollam

AJMER VIDYUT VITRAN NIGAM LIMITED
Corporate Identification Number (CIN)- U40109RJ2000SGC016482
Regd. Off.: Vidyut Bhawan, Panchsheel Nagar, Makarwali Road, Ajmer- 305 004.
(TURN-KEY WORKS CIRCLE) Phone: +91-145-2644507, Fax:+91-145-2644507,
E-mail :- setwavvnl2022@gmail.com, Website :-www.avvnl.com
No. AVVNL/SE (TW)/XEN (TW-II)/AEN(TW-I)/NIT/TN-443/D.3922 Dated :- 31/03/2023
निविदा सूचना संख्या 23 (2022-23)
'E Bids in two parts (Techno Commercial bid and Price Bid) are invited from eligible contractors for tenders enquiry under TN-443 for 12 circles of Ajmer Discom.
1. Short Term NIT No. AJD/SE/TW/ TN-443 for decide the operation & maintenance of 1713 Nos. 33/11 KV Substation (in various Lots) in domain of Ajmer Discom. **(UBN No. : AVV2223SLOB00671)**
All the details regarding tender is available at our website **www.avvnl.com** and **www.eproc.rajathan.gov.in**. In future corrigendum/extension, if any shall be published only at website **www.avvnl.com** and **www.eproc.rajathan.gov.in**.
Raj.Samwad/C/22/17158 Superintending Engineer (TW)

TAMILNADU MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD.
(A Government of Tamilnadu Undertaking)
No.417, Pantheon Road, Egmore, Chennai-600008. Phone:28191890/28190259; Fax: 044 -28190636

Sl. No	Online Tender no. / Rate Contract (RC) No./ item with qty./ Document Cost	Sale Period	Pre bid	Last date Submission	Opening
1	Online Tender No.E940/CGW/TNJ/TNMSC/ENGG/2023, Dt.30.03.2023- Cytogenetic Workstation (1) – Rs.5,725/-	03.04.2023 to 18.04.2023	11.04.2023 11.00 AM	19.04.2023 11.00 AM	19.04.2023 12.00 Noon
2	Online Tender No.E941/HPLC/TNJ/TNMSC/ENGG/2023, Dt.30.03.2023- High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (1) – Rs.3,435/-	03.04.2023 to 18.04.2023	11.04.2023 12.00 Noon	19.04.2023 11.00 AM	19.04.2023 12.00 Noon
3	Online RC Tender No.E942/SCOPE/RC/TNMSC/ENGG/2023, Dt.30.03.2023- Advanace Laparoscope Set with High Definition Camera (8) & Diagnostic & Operative Hysteroscope with Hysteromat (4) – Rs.5,725/-	05.04.2023 to 08.05.2023	12.04.2023 11.00 AM	09.05.2023 11.00 AM	09.05.2023 12.00 Noon
4	Online RC Tender No.E943RTPCR/RC/TNMSC/ENGG/2023, Dt.30.03.2023- Real Time PCR (36)– Rs.5,725/-	05.04.2023 to 08.05.2023	12.04.2023 12.00 Noon	09.05.2023 11.00 AM	09.05.2023 12.00 Noon

For details visit **www.tenders.tn.gov.in** and TNMSC website **www.tnmsc.tn.gov.in**
DIPR/1958/TENDER/2023 General Manager (Equipment)
"சோதனை கடந்து சுதந்திரம் அடைந்தோம், சாதனை புரிந்து சரித்திரம் படைப்போம்."

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
GROUND WATER DEPARTMENT
NATIONAL HYDROLOGY PROJECT
E-TENDER NOTICE IFB No: TSGW/NHP/2022-23/PW/8871
Following online tender is invited by the Ground Water Department, Govt of Telangana from eligible bidders under National Competitive Bidding (NCB).

Details	Important Dates
Lot-III-Construction of 241 Nos of Full/ Partial Protection Works to the existing piezometers drilled in Telangana region (6 districts viz-Adilabad, Asifabad, Jagtial, Mancherial, Nirmaland Nizamabad)	*Start Date of Download:* 02/04/2023 (10.30 hrs)
Lot-IV-Construction of 243 Nos of Full/ Partial Protection works to the existing piezometers drilled in Telangana region (6 districts viz-Kamareddy, Karimnagar, Medak, Peddapally, Rajanna Siricilla and Siddipet)	*Date of Pre-bid Meeting:* 17/04/2023 (11.30 hrs)
Lot-V-Construction of 139 Nos of Full/ Partial Protection works to the existing piezometers drilled in Telangana region (7 districts viz-JogulambaGadwal, Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Nalgonda, Narayanpet, Hyderabad and Medchal Malkajgiri)	*Last Date of Submission:* 06/05/2023 (15.00 hrs)
Lot-VI-Construction of 218 Nos of Full/Partial Protection works to the existing piezometers drilled in Telangana region(4 districts viz-Rangareddy,Sangareddy, Vikarabad and Yadadri Bhongiri)	

The details of IFB are available on **https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app** (Tender Id No.: 2023_GWDTS_747694_1), **https://gwd.telangana.gov.in** and **http://nhp.mowr.gov.in** websites.
Sd/- Dr. Pandith Madhnure
DIPR R.O. No. : 1464-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2022-23 Director & Nodal Officer, NHP Ground Water Department

The West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited
(A Govt. of West Bengal Enterprise)
Corporate Identity No. U40104WB1985SGC039154
Registered & Corporate Office : Bidyut Unnayan Bhaban
Plot No.: 3/C, LA - Block, Sector- III, Bidhannagar, Kol-700106
Expression of Interest
WBPDCL/ Tend-Adv/ 22-23/CORP/CC-2004 Dated 31.03.2023
(EOI) for consultancy for Project Preparation and Project Management for (EIA), (SSA) etc. and due diligence activities i.r.o. MW Scale Floating Solar Project at Bakreswar Dam, District-Birbhum, State: WB, India
Last date of submission of EOI: 26.04.2023.
For more please visit **ADB's portal** in the link below:
https://selfservice.adb.org/OA_HTML/adb/xxcrs/jsp/ADBCsrnFwd.jsp?sel=187004
ICA-T7037(2)/2022

SMART CITY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM LIMITED
4th Floor, Felicity Square Building, Opp. AG Office, Statue,
Thiruvananthapuram - 695001, +91 - 0471 - 4010374
CIN U75302KL2017SGC05027
E-TENDER NOTICE
Request for proposal (RFP) for Selection of System Integrator for Implementing Passenger Information System and Surveillance system for the selected buses in Trivandrum District

Sl. No	Name of Project	E-Tender ID	Bid Submission Last Date
1	Request for proposal (RFP) for Selection of System Integrator for Implementing Passenger Information System and Surveillance system for the selected buses in Trivandrum District	2023_SCTLT_570455_1	22nd April 2023
Date and Time of opening Price Bid: To be intimated separately after technical evaluation.			

All the documents and details are available on the E procurement website.
Bids are only accepted online on the website **https://etenders.kerala.gov.in**
(Sd/-)
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SMART CITY THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Ltd.

कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग वृत जालोर
क्रमांक : अअ/वृत/जा/2022-23/3404 दिनांक : 24.03.2023
निविदा सूचना संख्या : 11 वर्ष 2022-2023
NIB No. : PWD2223A4891
राजस्थान के राज्यपाल महोदय की ओर से माननीय मुख्यमंत्री महोदय बजट घोषणा वर्ष 2023-24 के अन्तर्गत स्वीकृत विभिन्न सड़कों के निर्माण कार्य (दोष निवारण अवधि 5 वर्ष सहित) हेतु उपयुक्त श्रेणी में सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग राजस्थान में पंजीकृत संवेदकों एवं राज्य सरकार/ केन्द्र सरकार के अधिकृत संगठनों/ केन्द्रीय लोक निर्माण विभाग/ डाक एवं दूर संचार विभाग/ रेल्वे इत्यादि में पंजीकृत संवेदकों, जो कि राजस्थान सरकार के उपयुक्त श्रेणी के संवेदकों के समकक्ष हो, से निर्धारित प्रपत्र में कुल 6 पैकेज कार्य जिनकी लागत राशि रू. 1478.40 लाख है, अतः उक्त कार्यों के लिए ई-टेण्डरिंग प्रक्रिया हेतु ऑनलाइन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है।

ऑनलाइन निविदा आवेदन डाउनलोड एवं अपलोड करने की तारीख	:	29 मार्च 2023, 9.30 बजे से 17 अप्रेल 2023, सायं 06.00 बजे तक

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Novel catalyst offers to make hydrogen more viable as fuel

P. Sunderarajan

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi, have developed a novel carbon-based catalyst to make water electrolysis more efficient, as well as being more stable and affordable than other catalysts that perform the same function.

The findings were published in the journal *Carbon Trends* in October 2022.

The electrolysis of water – to split it into its constituent atoms using electricity – consumes a lot of energy. The traditional solution is to use a catalyst to induce the water molecules to split at a lower energy. Common catalysts are based on iridium and ruthenium, which are expensive and in great demand in other sectors.

In the new study, research groups of Assistant Professor Swati Sharma and Associate Professor Aditi Halder reported a porous carbon material containing nitrogen that functions both as a catalyst and as the anode in electrolysers, and could substitute the metal-based catalysts.

The researchers produced this material, called 'laser carbon', by exposing a sheet of a polyimide polymer to a laser beam, carbonising the exposed bits and leaving the remainder rich in nitrogen.

In an electrolyser, the nitrogen atoms drew electron clouds towards themselves, encouraging nearby carbon atoms to bond with atoms or molecules containing electron pairs. So, the location of these atoms became active sites for the oxygen evolution reaction (OER).

The OER is a stumbling block in electrolysis because it has many intermediate steps and proceeds slower than the rest of the reaction cycle, thus reducing the energy efficiency.

Laser carbon intervenes by reducing the OER overpotential: the difference between the voltage at which the OER takes place in reality and the minimum voltage at which it can take place. Lowering the overpotential allows OER to proceed vigorously.

According to Dr. Sharma, laser carbon is cheaper to produce, simpler to synthesise, and "can be batch-manufactured with a laser" in an environmentally friendly process, unlike other carbon-based catalysts.

Dr. Halder also said the production process increases the surface area laser carbon present to catalyse the reaction.

While the researchers also said that the material's catalytic activity is inferior to that of metal-based catalysts, it can be improved "in the fabrication process and use of other polymers".

(*Sunderarajan Padmanabhan is a Delhi-based freelance science correspondent*)

IACS's novel compound treats drug-resistant kala-azar infection

Current annual estimates of kala-azar are about 1,00,000, with more than 95% of cases reported to WHO from India and other tropical countries

R. Prasad

Experimental work undertaken in mice has shown a novel quinoline derivative to be effective in sharply reducing the load of *Leishmania donovani* in both the spleen and liver of lab-grown mice. The highlight of the work carried out by researchers at the Kolkata-based Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) is the potential of the quinoline derivatives to treat drug-resistant leishmaniasis, also called kala-azar (black fever).

The work was published recently in the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*.

DNA architecture

The quinoline derivative is a potent inhibitor of an enzyme called topoisomerase 1 (LdTop1), which is essential for maintenance of DNA architecture in the parasites; this enzyme is distinct from the one found in humans. Poisoning of LdTop1 imparts a significant level of cytotoxicity to both the *Leishmania* parasites found in gut of sandfly vectors (promastigotes) as well as the form found in the infected humans (amastigotes) of both the wild type and the antimony-resistant isolates without inducing any lethality to human and mice host cells.

Kala-azar is a vector borne (sandfly) neglected tropical disease caused by the protozoan parasites of the genus leishmania that afflicts the world's poorest populations in over 90 countries. Current annual estimates of kala-azar are about 1,00,000, with more than 95% of cases reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) from India and other tropical countries, most importantly co-infection with HIV, which leads to an immunocompromised state.

The four States endemic for kala-azar in India are: Bihar (33 districts), Jharkhand (4 districts), West Bengal (11 districts), and Uttar Pradesh (six districts). The current treatment regimens against kala-azar use formulations that are toxic and induce high levels of drug-resistance.

"Since the enzyme is essential for parasite replication and transcription from DNA to RNA, inhibition of its activity leads to DNA torsional strain, degradation of the DNA, and ultimately parasitic cell death," says Dr. Benu Brata Das, Professor at the School of Biological Sciences, IACS, and the corresponding author of the paper. "The host human counterpart enzyme is not sensitive to the selected antileishmanial-quinoline derivatives, and is well tolerated in mice and mammalian cell lines tested in our laboratory. This promises minimal side effects in patients."

Antileishmanial activity

The novel inhibitor targeting the leishmania parasites was identified by screening them against recombinant Leishmania topoisomerase 1 enzyme. The molecules were synthesised by Prof. Anil Kumar and his group from the Department of Chemistry, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani. In all, 21 derivatives were prepared and evaluated for their antileishmanial activity, and one of them was found to be effective.

The derivative was found to generate persistent and less reversible DNA breaks compared with the camptothecin inhibitor (discovered in 1966) even after the novel inhibitor identified by the IACS-led team was removed from the culture medium leading to enhanced parasite killing.

Srijita Paul Chowdhuri from IACS and the first author of the paper says: "We have developed a mouse model of kala-azar by infecting the mice with both antimony-resistant and antimony-sensitive *Leishmania donovani* parasites in-vivo and have shown that our compound has greater efficiency in clearing the antimony-resistant parasites present in the spleen, liver, and blood of infected mice."

Prof. Das explains that the novel inhibitor not only clears the parasite burden from the infected mice but also confers a host protective immune response. The latter effect is achieved by up-regulating the Th1 cytokines facilitating parasite clearance. "The up-regulation of the cytokines can be exploited for treating drug-resistant leishmaniasis," he says.

Prof. Das adds: "Our laboratory data brings new potential for clinical trials of the quinoline derivative in human hosts infected with drug-resistant *leishmaniasis* in the rural endemic areas without inducing cytotoxic side effects commonly seen with currently available drugs."

"Collectively, we provide compelling evidence that the novel derivative is a promising anti-leishmaniasis drug candidate to overcome the emerging cases of multidrug resistance and therapeutic failures," they write. They add that further studies are required to test if the novel derivative develops resistance to anti-leishmaniasis therapy by generating point mutations. Also, further studies are needed to test the drug-resistance potential prior to undertaking clinical trials on humans, they note.

Studies in mice show promise

Kala-azar is endemic in four Indian States — Bihar (33 districts), Jharkhand (4 districts), West Bengal (11 districts), and Uttar Pradesh (six districts)

The culprit: Kala-azar is a vector borne (sand fly) neglected tropical disease caused by the protozoan parasites of the genus Leishmania.

1. The current treatment regimens against Kala-azar still use formulations that are toxic and induce high levels of drug-resistance
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3. In all, 21 derivatives were evaluated for their antileishmanial activity, and one of them was found to be effective
4. The derivative was found to generate persistent and less reversible DNA breaks compared with the camptothecin inhibitor (discovered in 1966)
5. The derivative has greater efficiency in clearing even the antimony-resistant parasites present in the spleen, liver, and blood of infected mice
6. Further studies are needed to test the drug-resistance potential prior to undertaking clinical trials

Marburg virus outbreak in two African countries

Bani Jolly
Vinod Scaria

Early this year, Equatorial Guinea and Tanzania reported outbreaks of Marburg virus disease (MVD), the first-ever outbreak of the disease in these countries. As the countries respond to the outbreaks through contact tracing and restricting movement across affected regions, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated the risk of spread of the disease as "very high" across both countries.

The Marburg virus was first identified in 1967 during outbreaks in Germany and Serbia and is known to cause severe and fatal viral haemorrhagic fevers in humans.

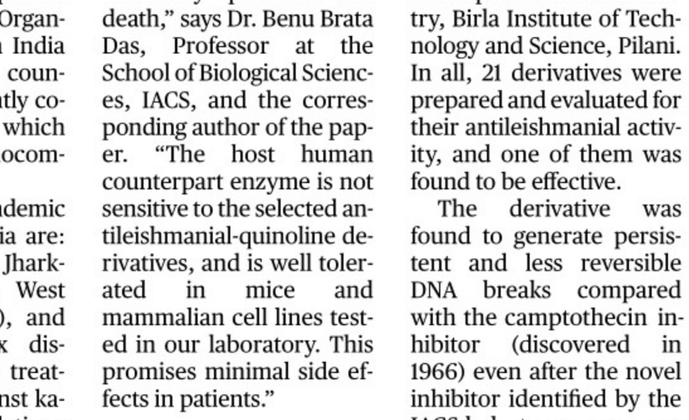
The virus is closely related to another deadly virus, Ebola and is rated as a high-risk pathogen by the WHO. Marburg virus is transmitted to humans through contact with infected animals such as fruit bats, and further human-to-human transmission can occur through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected patient or contaminated surfaces resulting in outbreaks.

Since its initial detection in 1967, several outbreaks of Marburg virus have been detected between 1975 and 2023, with African countries being the most affected and often with high fatality rates up to 90%, depending on the early access to quality care.

In recent years, and for the first time, isolated cases have been reported in Guinea and Ghana in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

New outbreaks

An outbreak of unknown haemorrhagic fever linked to a funeral ceremony was reported from Equatorial Guinea on February 7, 2023, which was later confirmed as Marburg virus on February 13 by the WHO. A month later, Tanzania reported an outbreak of MVD on March 21, after the detection of eight suspected cases, five of which were fatal. The genome sequence of a Marburg virus from Equatorial Guinea was quickly made available in public domain by researchers. The sequence shows high similarity with Marburg virus genomes previously found in fruit bats, suggesting a potential zoonotic origin.



Caution: There are no approved vaccines, antivirals or monoclonal antibodies for Marburg virus yet. GETTY IMAGES

Is there a concern?

There are no approved vaccines, antivirals or monoclonal antibodies for Marburg virus yet and supportive care to manage symptoms and prevent complications forms the mainstay. However, the WHO aims to accelerate trials of some investigational vaccines. Case detection through contact tracing, molecular diagnosis and quarantine is central to managing the spread of the disease.

While the two outbreaks have triggered a rapid response to control the spread, the outbreak in Equatorial Guinea has spread to multiple provinces and has even crept into a populous city, Bata.

Equatorial Guinea has, so far, reported a total of 35 confirmed cases and 27 deaths. The large geographic spread of the infection in the country and the unidentified epidemiological links between many of the reported cases suggest a wider range of transmission of the virus.

Surveillance

As the affected countries continue to make efforts to contain the disease and another country, Burundi, investigates a suspected outbreak of viral haemorrhagic fever, surveillance of emerging viral diseases is crucial to help early detection, monitoring the circulation and evolution, and develop effective diagnostics, prevention and control measures. It is only natural that the concept of One Health is increasingly taking centre-stage.

(The authors are researchers at the CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi. All opinions expressed are personal)

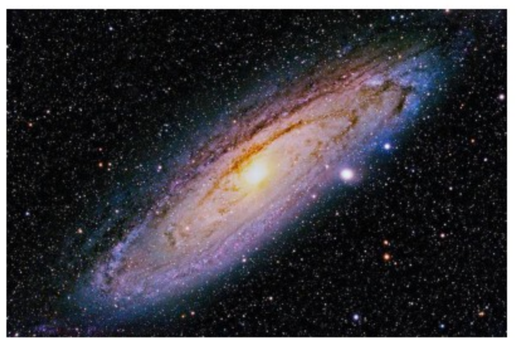
SNAPSHOTS

Indigenous cultures adopted horses of Spanish origin

Indigenous cultures of the American Great Plains and northern Rockies had integrated domestic horses of Spanish ancestry into their life ways long before the arrival of European colonisers to the region (*Science*). By integrating osteological, genomic, isotopic, paleopathological and radiocarbon evidence, Taylor et al. discovered that early domestic North American horses show a genetic affinity to Spanish horse, indicating a European origin and had spread throughout the region far earlier than previously believed.

Theropod dinosaur teeth were hidden behind thin 'lips'

Contrary to more than a century of scientific and popular depictions, the large teeth of *Tyrannosaurus rex* and other toothy theropod dinosaurs were likely completely covered by thin, scaly "lips" when the mouth was closed, a study says (*Science*). In contrast to their closest toothed crocodilian relatives, theropod teeth lacked any evidence of outer surface wear, indicating the existence of extraoral tissues and oral secretions needed to keep them hydrated and protected from exposure.



Intergalactic stream of cosmic carbon feeding massive galaxy

Radio telescope observations have revealed a cold stream of intergalactic atomic carbon gas feeding star formation in a massive radio galaxy in the young Universe. The findings provide observational evidence supporting theoretical cosmological models and offer new insights into the origins of the cosmic materials that enable galaxy and star formation. Galaxies evolve by accreting gas, either in mergers with other galaxies or from streams of cold molecular gas.

Question Corner

Climate change

Will climate change result in slowing down Antarctic circulation?

Antarctic circulation could slow by more than 40% over the next three decades, with significant implications for the oceans and climate. Such decline of the ocean circulation will stagnate the bottom of the oceans and generate further impacts, affecting climate and marine ecosystems for centuries to come.

Cold water that sinks near Antarctica drives the deepest flow of the overturning circulation – a network of currents that spans the world's oceans. The overturning carries heat, carbon, oxygen and nutrients around the globe. This influences climate, sea level and the productivity of marine ecosystems.

According to a release, Matthew England, Deputy Director of the ARC Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science (ACEAS) at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, says the modelling shows that if global carbon emissions continue at the current rate, then the Antarctic overturning will slow by more than 40% in the next 30 years – and on a trajectory that looks headed towards collapse.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

The moratorium call on ChatGPT's successor

Why are tech leaders calling for a pause on developing more powerful artificial intelligence systems?

John Xavier

The story so far:

On March 29, Elon Musk and a group of AI experts signed an open letter calling for a moratorium on developing artificial intelligence (AI) systems that are more powerful than OpenAI's recently launched large language model (LLM), GPT-4. The letter, which at the time of writing had over 1,300 signatories, called on all AI labs to immediately pause, for at least six months, training of any systems more powerful than GPT-4.

What does the letter say?

Citing one of the Asilomar AI principles on how advances in AI could profoundly impact people's lives, the Future of Life Institute (FLI) issued letter noted that "AI labs are locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one – not even their creators – can understand, predict, or reliably control." The Asilomar AI Principles are one of the earliest sets of AI governing principles laid out at the Beneficial AI 2017 conference hosted by FLI.

What is the context?

FLI's open letter comes amid rapid development and deployment of AI technology in several industries. Since OpenAI dropped its generative pre-trained (GPT) chatbot in November, allowing people to freely interact with ChatGPT, there has been a dramatic rise in adoption of AI by many firms.

> Some AI experts feel the world is moving towards a scenario where machines will triumph over humans; others see AI advances as mediocre intelligence, which is potentially unreliable

The Microsoft-backed chatbot wowed people with its instant, and often apt, replies. It could correct software codes, and explain almost everything on the Internet. Roughly three months after its launch, the company allowed developers to integrate ChatGPT's API with their applications for a fee. Enterprise version of the chatbot, called ChatGPT Plus, has already been integrated by Snapchat, Unreal Engine and Shopify in their applications. Such rapid adoption by businesses is heating up competition. Google has taken up the gauntlet. The Alphabet-owned company launched Bard, a version of its Lamda language model. In China, Internet giant Baidu has launched Ernie, an AI-powered chatbot than can summarise financial statements. Separately, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's media lab has developed ELSA, an AI bot that can act as a psychotherapy counsellor. It could potentially be deployed in cognitive behavioural therapy sessions.

Why does FLI's letter focus on GPT-4?

On March 14, OpenAI launched its most advanced LLM yet: GPT-4. This model has been trained on a trillion parameters, compared to ChatGPT's 175 billion parameters. Having access to such a large dataset allows GPT-4 to learn and understand complex patterns and nuances in natural language far better than its predecessor. Unlike ChatGPT, GPT-4 is capable of handling both text and image-based queries. This makes it versatile when compared to other AI language models. Such multi-modal advances give GPT-4 scale to get closer to artificial general intelligence (AGI). That means machine intelligence could be as good as human intelligence. Computer scientists and ethicists are grappling with this eventuality. Even Sam Altman, OpenAI's co-founder, wrote about the potential negative aspect of AGI stating this technology could come with "serious risk of misuse, drastic accidents, and societal disruption." He called on developers of AGI to figure out a way to get it right. "A gradual transition gives people, policymakers, and institutions time to understand what's happening, personally experience the benefits and downsides of these systems, adapt our economy, and to put regulation in place," he wrote.

What is the view of AI experts?

AI experts who have signed FLI's letter approach the rise of LLM-based bots from different vantage points. Some see these developments as accelerating humanity towards a doomsday scenario where machines will triumph over humans. Others see these advances as mediocre intelligence that are potentially unreliable.

Will it have the desired impact?

It is hard to say whether the letter will have its desired impact as OpenAI is already training GPT-4's successor. And the Microsoft-backed company has not yet responded to the open letter. According to some developers and tech entrepreneurs, GPT-5 could be indistinguishable to humans, and the language model could achieve AGI by the end of this year. This prediction comes at a time when there are no regulations in place to enforce a ban on developing AI. Currently, governments do not have any policy tools to halt work in AI development.

Can countries be sued over climate change?

Why has the UN asked the International Court of Justice to give an 'advisory opinion' on whether countries have legal obligations to protect people from climate extremities? Which country brought this issue to the UN? What happens next?

Suhasini Haidar

The story so far:

On March 29, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that asked the International Court of Justice at The Hague to provide an opinion on what kind of obligations countries have towards climate change reduction, based on the promises they have made to the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). What made it particularly important was that the resolution passed by consensus had been pushed through by one of the smallest countries in the world, the Pacific Island of Vanuatu, an island that was devastated in 2015 by the effects of Cyclone Pam, believed to have been spurred by climate change, that wiped out 95% of its crops and affected two-thirds of its population.

What does the resolution seek?

The draft resolution (A/77/L.58) invoked article 96 of the UN Charter to ask the ICJ to deliberate on two questions: 1) What are the obligations of states under international law to ensure the protection of the climate system for present and future generations? 2) What are the legal consequences under these obligations for states where they, by their acts and omissions, have caused significant harm to the climate system, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and for people who are harmed. The resolution refers to several international protocols including the Paris Agreement (2015), the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The entire process is expected to take about 18 months for the ICJ to deliberate and deliver its opinion.

> India has been cautiously silent about the move, although it is supportive of the need for climate justice

What is India's position?

India has thus far been cautiously silent about the move, although it is generally supportive of the need for climate justice, and holding the developed world accountable for global warming. The government is understood to have referred the resolution to legal authorities in the country who will look into the implications and international ramifications of the ICJ opinion. India has updated its NDC (nationally determined contribution) commitments, as required by the 2015 Paris Agreement and has said it's on its way to sourcing half its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. However, it is significant that India did not join the overwhelming majority of countries that co-sponsored the draft resolution. In the neighbourhood, the list of co-sponsors included Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and a number of island countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India is also watching how global powers like the U.S. and China respond to the resolution, as without their support, it will be hard to implement. During the discussion on the resolution, the U.S. representative voiced concerns about whether "launching a judicial process" was the best way to reach "shared goals". "Successfully tackling the climate crisis is best achieved via diplomatic efforts," the U.S. representative added, according to a UN press release. Indian officials have also said that the ICJ process can only speak about climate change issues and problems broadly and that it cannot name or profile any one country in the process. Pointing to the Paris agreement as a landmark shift towards a "bottom-up" approach, where states themselves determine their ability to mitigate climate change, they also said any attempt to impose an opinion in a "top-down" manner would be resisted. Many other countries are likely to voice their opinion as the process gathers momentum in the months ahead.

What do sponsors of the resolution want?

A legal opinion from the ICJ, the highest global court recognised by all 193 UN members is expected to bolster the efforts under the UNFCCC to ensure all countries work towards mitigating climate change and global warming to the suggested 1.5-2°C limit. While it is expected to give its opinion on the basis of the Convention already consented to by all countries, what will be watched closely is what it says about more contentious issues such as climate reparations by the developed world, legal culpability for countries that don't achieve their NDC promises, and climate support to the most vulnerable parts of the world battling the effects of global warming. According to the latest IPCC "Synthesis report", global climate levels have already increased 1.1 degrees since pre-industrial levels in the past century, and deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions reductions, as much as by a half are required by 2030 to keep this goal. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that the ICJ opinion was "essential", and would "guide the actions and conduct of states in their relations with each other, as well as towards their own citizens."

The UNGA route adopted by Vanuatu and its supporters also appears to have been more inclusive than two other attempts for an Advisory Opinion sought in December 2022 by Small Island States to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea; and another by Colombia and Chile in January 2023 at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) asking for an Advisory Opinion on human rights obligations for countries pertaining to the "climate emergency".

What sparked the idea for the resolution?

The original idea for taking the case for climate obligations to the highest legal court came from a group of 27 Pacific Island law students, who set up a campaign and brought it to the Pacific Islands Forum. Since 2019, the Vanuatu government, with the support of an 18-member "core group" of countries, has been promoting the idea of an Advisory Opinion from the ICJ. It prepared the draft resolution that was eventually co-sponsored by 132 countries at the UNGA and went through without a vote. While the U.S was among a few countries that expressed some reservations, no country opposed the resolution. Vanautu's Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau, who spearheaded the campaign, called it "a win for climate justice of epic proportions".

Is the advisory opinion of the ICJ binding?

The ICJ is being asked for an "advisory opinion", which by definition would not be legally binding as an ICJ judgment. However, its clarification of international environmental laws would make the process more streamlined, particularly as the COP (Conference of the Parties) process looks at various issues like climate finance, climate justice, and the most recently agreed to "loss and damages" fund at the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh last year. The ICJ carries "legal weight and moral authority", said the sponsors of the resolution, and gave as examples advisory opinions given in the past on the Palestinian issue (Construction of the Wall) and nuclear threats that have been respected.

Why has Israel paused judicial reform plan?

What is the controversy around Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to overhaul the judiciary? Does it aim to curb the powers of the courts? Will the Prime Minister be able to build consensus with opposition parties to push through the Bills?

Stanly Johny

The story so far:

On the night of March 27, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he would delay his government's plan to overhaul the country's judiciary by a month. The government's plan had triggered massive protests and strikes by the opposition, civil society as well as unions who accused the government of weakening the judiciary. Mr. Netanyahu, who came to power late last year with the support of ultra-orthodox and far-right parties, says he will not step back from the plan but seek to build consensus before pushing to pass it in the Knesset (Israel's Parliament).

> Faced with public anger, Prime Minister Netanyahu decided to delay contentious plans for the judiciary

What is the government's plan?

The judicial reform plan has a set of proposals which, together, will strengthen the government's hand over the country's courts. Currently, the Supreme Court can strike down any law passed by the Knesset. The government proposal seeks to curtail judicial review over legislation and then empower Parliament to override court decisions with a simple majority of 61 votes (out of 120). Another proposed change seeks to abolish the "reasonability test"– the Supreme Court will no longer be able to judge the reasonability of Knesset legislation, government decisions or appointments. The government also seeks to take control of judicial appointments. Under the current set-up, judges are chosen by a nine-member committee – three Supreme Court judges (including the court President), two members of the Israeli Bar Association, two members from the Knesset and two from the government (Ministers). According to the proposed reforms, the members of the Bar Association would be replaced by two "public representatives" picked by the government, which means the government will have a majority of votes in the committee.

Stiff resistance: Clashes erupt during a demonstration against the Israel government's judicial overhaul in Jerusalem on March 27. GETTY IMAGES

Why is the government pushing these Bills?

Over the years, Israel's polity has shifted towards the extreme right. The current government, composed of Likud (right-wing), United Torah Judaism and Shas (ultra-Orthodox) and Religious Zionist and Jewish Power, is the most right-wing government in the country's history. The far-right and religious parties have argued that Israel has lost its balance between the judiciary and the executive and the legislature. They are essentially saying that the judiciary is controlled by liberals and leftists, while the polity has shifted to the right. The government wants to give mass exemption from conscription to religious Jews. They have also passed a law preventing legal authorities from removing the Prime Minister from office terming him "unfit to rule" (only the Knesset and the Cabinet can remove the leader from office). But the government fears that the Supreme Court can strike down these plans unless the judiciary's powers are clipped. So for right-wing parties, the existing judicial structure is an impediment for their push to remake the Israeli state.

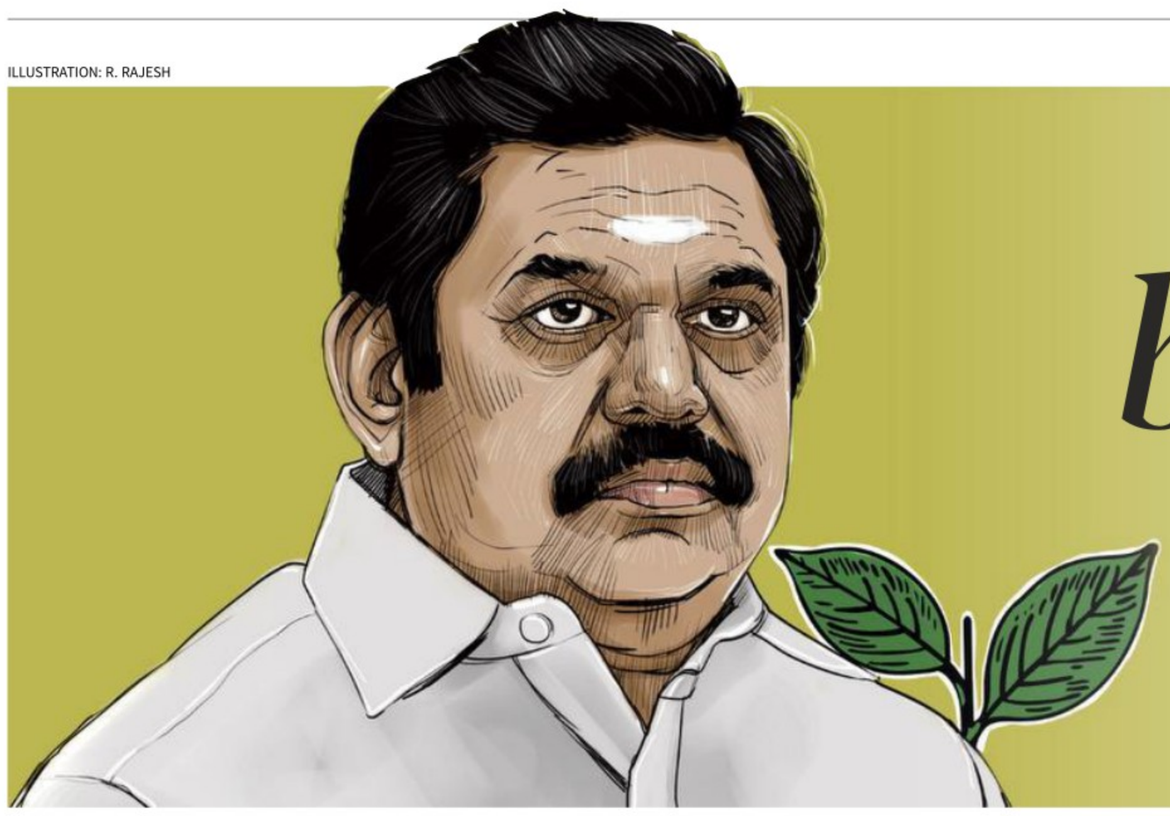
Why did Mr. Netanyahu back off?

The government's move to table the Bills in the Knesset triggered immediate protests. The protesters said that the Bills would weaken the judiciary and destroy the checks and balances in the system. Mr. Netanyahu himself is facing multiple charges and the Attorney General had asked him to stay away from the judicial overhaul. Earlier this year, the Prime Minister had to drop one of his ultra-Orthodox colleagues from the Cabinet after the Supreme Court said the appointment of Aryeh Deri, leader of the Shas, as a Minister, was "highly unreasonable". They said the reforms, if passed, would give the government unchecked powers over the courts. Mr. Nentanyahu initially dismissed the protests, while Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right leader of Jewish Power, warned the Prime Minister against "surrendering to the anarchists". But the protests only grew in strength, drawing in criticism from abroad as well. The turning point was Defence Minister Yoav Gallant breaking ranks with the Prime Minister. Mr. Gallant, a former Major General and a member of the Prime Minister's Likud party, asked the coalition to delay the judicial overhaul, citing security concerns. Opposition to the Bills had spread to Israel's reservists as well as its diplomatic community. Some of the military reservists, in protest, failed to report, mounting pressure on the defence establishment. Mr. Nentanyahu fired Mr. Gallant, but it only made matters worse. Spontaneous protests broke out across the country on Monday and Israel's largest union, with some 8,00,000 members, struck work, grounding flights, shutting government officers, universities and public places. Faced with unprecedented public anger, Mr. Netanyahu decided to delay his plans.

What happens next?

For now, Mr. Netanyahu, despite the setback, has managed to keep his right-religious coalition together. But Israeli media have reported that to get Mr. Ben-Gvir's approval for the delay, the Prime Minister has agreed to form a new security body called the national guard under Ben-Gvir's National Security Ministry. Mr. Ben-Gvir and other allies have supported the delay for now, but they have not backtracked from their push to reform the judiciary. Mr. Netanyahu plans to build consensus with main opposition parties Yesh Atid and Blue and White before pushing for the Bills. But it's not clear how much compromise Mr. Netanyahu's allies would accept. Even if a compromise formula emerges, how will the Prime Minister sell it to the public as the protests were not driven by opposition parties alone. Mr. Netanyahu, who first came to power in 1996, has seen many a rise and fall. From every challenge, he has emerged stronger. But this is perhaps the biggest political challenge he is facing in his career.

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH



Accidental leader, born politician

Edappadi K. Palaniswami

The former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, who rose to the top from the political uncertainty that followed Jayalalithaa's death, has since won the loyalty of party colleagues, neutralised challengers and consolidated his grip over the AIADMK

D. Suresh Kumar

In politics, accidental leaders eventually fade away after hogging the limelight in the positions to which they were catapulted by circumstances or by their masters. Only a few manage to change the tide in their favour or outwit their political handlers.

Former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami belongs to that breed of politicians who emerge from relative obscurity and seize opportunities to checkmate opponents by making the right moves on the political chessboard. Starting off from the lower rung, he has taken over as general secretary of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), a party that had ruled the State for over 30 years. Ahead of the Lok Sabha election in 2024, this role puts him in the driver's seat of an AIADMK-led alliance, which will likely include the Bharatiya Janata Party.

His rise was slow and steady for much of his political career, but accelerated in recent years by an element of impatience and an uncanny ability to ruthlessly neutralise opponents.

In 1989, at 35, he debuted in the Legislative Assembly with his leader Jayalalithaa, then heading a faction of the AIADMK after the death of party founder M.G. Ramachandran (MGR). The name of his constituency, "Edappadi", got prefixed to his name. He served briefly in the Lok Sabha (1998-99), before joining Jayalalithaa's Cabinet in 2011. Yet, Mr. Palaniswami largely remained an inconsequential political figure outside his native turf in western Tamil Nadu. There was nothing noteworthy about the performance of this jaggery trader-turned-politician in the Assembly or Parliament.

As a Minister holding the meatier portfolios of Highways and Public Works Department (PWD) and ranked within the top five in the Cabinet seniority order, he preferred to be reverent to Jayalalithaa. Till her death in December 2016, he remained out of media limelight as were most Cabinet colleagues. There were whispers in political corridors about him being one among Jayalalithaa's kitchen cabinet members. In the party hierarchy, he was not prominent, though Jayalalithaa appointed him propaganda secretary, a post created by MGR for her in the early 1980s, and later an organising secretary.

Household name

It was only on Valentine's Day in 2017, when he met Governor C. Vidyasagar Rao staking claim to form the government, that Mr. Palaniswami became a household name in Tamil Nadu. However, the only perception people had was that of Mr. Palaniswami being a protégé of V.K. Sasikala, an extra-constitutional authority and former close aide of Jayalalithaa. People cringed at visuals of him crawling and prostrating to seek her blessings. What no one guessed was that the rustic man, with a tinge of holy ash smeared on his forehead and a toothy smile that would become his trademark, had stooped to conquer.

The circumstances under which he emerged as Chief Minister-designate were tumultuous. Ms. Sasikala had planned to step into her "surrogate sister" Jayalalithaa's role after getting O. Panneerselvam, hand-picked by her to be a "remote-controlled Chief Minister", to resign. Misguided by some external handlers, he revolted. She faced another setback when the Supreme Court convicted her in a corruption case in which Jayalalithaa was the prime accused.

With a majority of the AIADMK legislators herded together in a backwater resort to prevent defections to the Panneerselvam camp, Mr. Palaniswami, regarded by Ms. Sasikala as a loyalist, made the right moves. With the backing of his Gounder community, which had a large bloc of MLAs, he opened up resources to get more support. Given the precarious numbers in the Assembly, many believed Mr. Palaniswami may not last his tenure. But they were yet to see his survival instincts.

Before Ms. Sasikala headed to the Bengaluru prison, she appointed her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran, who had been expelled by Jayalalithaa, as the AIADMK deputy general secretary. The former MP decided to contest the bypoll in the Dr. Radhakrishnan Nagar constituency in Chennai, vacated by Jayalalithaa.

Mr. Palaniswami, a born politician, quickly sensed it will not be long before Mr. Dhinakaran came for his Chief Ministerial seat. Cognisant that he was no mass leader, he did what it took to earn the confidence of his Cabinet colleagues and legislators. He presented them with a choice – be subservient to the Sasikala family and survive on their benevolence; or stand by his side and enjoy the fruits of power. The Sasikala family was soon isolated. Thereafter, Mr. Palaniswami quelled a rebellion from 19 legislators supporting Mr. Dhinakaran, by extending an olive branch to Mr. Panneerselvam and his 10 MLAs to save the government. The AIADMK migrated to a dual leadership with Mr. Panneerselvam and Mr. Palaniswami enjoying equal powers as coordinator and joint coordinator.

Mr. Panneerselvam, a three-time former Chief Minister, appeared content with his rehabilitation as Deputy Chief Minister in the Cabinet. But Mr. Palaniswami was quietly doing everything to keep legislators and party functionaries happy and consolidating his hold on the party. This helped him foil Mr. Panneerselvam's bid to be the party's Chief Ministerial face in 2021.

Blessing in disguise

As an administrator, he was initially seen as weak and doing the bidding of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre. This partly led to the AIADMK alliance's crushing defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, he appeared clueless, calling it only a "rich man's disease". However, the same pandemic proved a blessing in disguise for Mr. Palaniswami to stabilise his administrative position. After grasping the situation, he toured Tamil Nadu overseeing measures to contain the spread of the infection. He began to confidently handle questions from journalists, taking him closer to the people who watched him on news channels. Over time, he would address meetings without speech notes.

Eventually, Mr. Palaniswami managed to give the DMK-led front a tough fight and his alliance won 75 seats – many from western Tamil Nadu – in the 234-member House. But he grew wary of the AIADMK's dual leadership. Mr. Panneerselvam, who had fewer supporters in the party's general council, was using his co-signatory powers to extract disproportionate benefits in matters of election ticket distribution. So, last July, Mr. Palaniswami sprang a surprise on Mr. Panneerselvam by getting his supporters to push for migrating to a unitary leadership. It was a political fight, which a miserably outnumbered Panneerselvam converted into a legal fight. It led to Mr. Panneerselvam and his supporters being expelled. With a single judge of the Madras High Court clearing the decks, Mr. Palaniswami has taken over as the general secretary, earning the acknowledgement of alliance party leaders. Mr. Panneerselvam has gone to appeal before a Division Bench.

There is little doubt that Mr. Palaniswami would have the last laugh in this matter. However, the challenge has just begun for him. His performance as the Leader of Opposition has been lacklustre. To survive in the long term, he would have to proactively take on the ruling DMK and win battles on the electoral front. The Lok Sabha polls are just a year away and he has to deliver to keep the flock together.

THE GIST

- In 1989, at 35, he debuted in the Legislative Assembly with his leader Jayalalithaa, then heading a faction of the AIADMK after party founder M.G. Ramachandran's death
- He served briefly in the Lok Sabha (1998-99), before joining Jayalalithaa's Cabinet in 2011, but largely remained an inconsequential political figure outside his native turf in western Tamil Nadu
- It was only on Valentine's Day in 2017, when he met Governor C. Vidyasagar Rao staking claim to form the government, that Palaniswami became a household name in Tamil Nadu

Into the future

Humza Yousaf

Scotland's new First Minister faces great challenges as he has to unite the party, rebuild public support for its independence campaign while addressing economic headwinds

Narayan Lakshman

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R KUMAR

With the election of Humza Yousaf (37) as the new head of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the next First Minister of the country, social media was agog with jokes about how, between him and U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, two sons of Pakistan and India, respectively, would negotiate the partition of the U.K. and independence of Scotland generations after a similar drama played out in the Indian subcontinent. The irony of the colonial project coming full circle in a small corner of Western Europe is undeniable. Yet, it is a fact that Mr. Yousaf, the son of Pakistani immigrants, the first ever Muslim and person of Asian descent to take up the top executive role in the Scottish government, and also the youngest leader in that capacity, has a long and potentially bumpy road ahead to make good on his campaign promises, including delivering the independence Scotland.

A life in politics

Born in Glasgow in 1985, Mr. Yousaf is the grandson of immigrants who travelled from Punjab to Scotland in the 1960s. While his father's family is originally from Pakistan, his mother's family were based in Kenya. Growing up in Glasgow, Mr. Yousaf was privately educated at Hutchesons' Grammar School and became interested from a young age in in politics, a subject that he went on to study later at the University of Glasgow, graduating with an MA in 2007.

Mr Yousaf kicked off his political journey as an office manager for the SNP's Bashir Ahmad, the first Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) of Muslim-Asian heritage. In the wake of Ahmad's passing in 2009, Mr. Yousaf went on to work for other MSPs, including Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, both First Ministers of Scotland.

In 2011, he was elected as an MSP from the Glasgow region, and he made waves for taking his oath to the Queen in English and in Urdu, and then repeated this after his 2016 re-election when he wore both a kilt and sherwani to reflect his joint Scottish and Pakistani heritage.

Mr. Yousaf's career with the SNP government was a long a fruitful one, which saw him serve in multiple capacities over the years, including as Transport Minister, Justice Secretary and Health Secretary.

However, he has often faced brickbats for leading sectors of government that underperformed in terms of service delivery to the people. For example, his record running Scotland's National Health Service came under fire for long waiting times and he was criticised for urging the public to "think twice" before calling 999 in late 2021.

Yet, more than any of these expected comments from his detractors in Scottish politics, the greatest challenge that Mr. Yousaf faces is the factionalised state of the SNP itself. Mr. Yousaf has pitched himself as the "continuity candidate" who will step into the shoes of his predecessor Nicola Sturgeon and take her agenda forward on the Scottish independence campaign. However, through a bruising leadership contest in the wake of Ms. Sturgeon's surprise resignation as First Minister, Mr. Yousaf appears to have lost the support of his rival, Kate Forbes, a pro-business candidate, who rejected his subsequent offer to become Rural Affairs Secretary, likely as it was considered a demotion from her prior role as Finance Secretary.

London is also in no mood for compromise, it appears: while Westminster might have hemmed and hawed over Ms. Sturgeon's forays into referendum territory, it appears to perceive the relative lack of internal strength within the SNP at this time, and might be content to string Mr. Yousaf along as he struggles to build momentum for his campaign. Support for independence has dropped among Scots, to 39%, less than the 44.7% who backed the campaign in the 2014 referendum, and considerably lower than the 58% that the proposal got in 2020.

If he wishes to leave behind a legacy for Scotland, Mr. Yousaf will not only have to unite the SNP and rebuild support for its independence campaign, but he will have to do so while facing the economic headwinds of rising inflation and energy costs, and tackling the difficult question of NHS reforms.

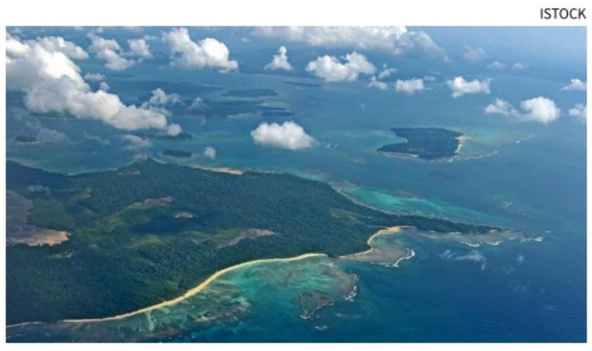
Plan for the paradise

Great Nicobar Project

After getting a series of expeditious clearances in the last two years, a ₹72,000-crore mega project for the 'holistic development' of the Great Nicobar Island is now in the offing

Diksha Munjal

ISTOCK



In February 2021, India's National Marine Turtle Action Plan mentioned Galathea Bay on the south-eastern coast of the Great Nicobar Island as one of the "Important Marine Turtle Habitats in India". Beaches on either side of the Galathea River are the most important nesting sites in the northern Indian Ocean for the Leatherback turtle, the world's largest marine turtle. The Action Plan says coastal development projects are major threats to turtle populations. But this kind of development is exactly what is planned for the future of Galathea Bay under the ₹72,000-crore mega project piloted by NITI Aayog for the "holistic development" of the Great Nicobar Island (GNI), situated at the southern end of the Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

The giant Leatherback is not the only species dotting this ecologically and culturally rich Island spanning over a little more than 900 sq. km, of which 850 sq. km is designated as a tribal reserve under the Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation, 1956. The Island has been home to two isolated and indigenous tribes – the Shompen and the Nicobaris – for thousands of years. The GNI was declared a biosphere reserve in 1989 and included in UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme in 2013. It has an unparalleled array of microhabitats. These habitats host numerous species, including marine animals, reptiles, birds, mammals and amphibians. Several of these, like the Nicobari Megapode, are endemic to GNI and found nowhere else in the world.

This unique ecological setting faces significant and imminent alterations as the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) late last year cleared the decks for the mega project, which ecologists, anthropologists, domain experts, and former civil servants have called an impending ecological disaster. NITI Aayog, however, says its plan is aimed at tapping the "largely unexplored potential" of the Island.

The plan has four components – a ₹35,000 crore transshipment port at Galathea Bay, a dual-use military-civil international airport, a power plant, and a township, to be built over 30 years on more than 160 sq. km of land, of which 130 sq. km is primary forest. The northern end of the project falls in the biosphere reserve, which means a part of this protected region will have to be allotted to the project.

Hasty clearances

As for the population, the Shompen and the Nicobarese were the sole inhabitants of the island until the government set up seven revenue villages, settling 330 ex-servicemen families from 1969 to 1980. These three communities make up the over 8,000 population of southern Nicobar, which includes GNI, Little Nicobar, and other small islands. The mega project will bring nearly 400,000 people to GNI during its span of three decades. An estimated 8.5 lakh trees are to be cut down in GNI's prehistoric rainforests.

For a project of this scale, size, and duration, the Great Nicobar plan has been accompanied by uncharacteristic haste in receiving various clearances. The plan was first floated at the height of the pandemic in 2020 and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), based in Port Blair, was charged with implementing the project. In September of that year itself, NITI Aayog issued a request for proposal for preparing the master plan for the project. In March 2021, a little-known company, Gurugram-based AECOM India, released a 126-page pre-feasibility report for NITI Aayog. In October last year, it got stage-1 (in-principle) forest clearance, while the environmental clearance was given on November 11 by the Ministry.

The GNI lies between the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea in a tectonically sensitive zone. Researchers and NGOs from across the country have raised several concerns relating to the tectonic volatility and disaster vulnerability of the islands, which have experienced nearly 444 earthquakes in the past 10 years. The tribal communities, who were displaced in the 2004 Tsunami, are still recovering from its impact.

INBRIEF

SAIL posts record steel production in 2022/23

Steel Authority of India (SAIL), the country's biggest state-owned steel producer, said it posted record high annual production in the 2022/23 year ended March 31. The steel maker produced 19.41 million tonnes of hot metal, up 3.6% from a year earlier, the company said in a statement. Crude steel production stood at 18.29 million tonnes, up 5.3% from last year. REUTERS

ECB's De Guindos warns of broad risks in financial sector

The European Central Bank (ECB) is monitoring broad risks across the financial sector and will act to preserve stability in the euro area, ECB VP Luis de Guindos said. He also reassured on the established banking sector in the single currency zone, saying banks had strong capital and liquidity positions but warned of wider dangers elsewhere in the system. Mr. De Guindos added while headline inflation was likely to decline considerably this year, underlying inflation dynamics would remain strong. REUTERS

'India office space demand slid 19% on global uncertainties'

India's office demand has been affected by global economic uncertainties with gross leasing of workspace falling 19% in January-March across six major cities, according to Colliers India. The real estate consultant on Saturday released data on the office market. "Share of the technology sector has declined steadily from 34% in Q1, 2022 to 22% in Q1, 2023, as corporates continue to focus on building in operational efficiencies through a hybrid model," said Peush Jain, MD, Office Services, India, Colliers. PTI

'Small savings to nudge up govt. interest cost'

Bank of Baroda economists see interest cost on borrowings from these instruments rising to 6.75% from 6.47%; still expect costs on those borrowings will be significantly lower than the estimated average cost range of 7.29%-7.35% for the Centre's planned ₹8.88 lakh crore market borrowings in H1

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

The Centre's decision to increase interest rates by 10-70 basis points on most small savings schemes for this quarter, will raise the government's interest costs on borrowings from these instruments to 6.75% from 6.47%, according to an assessment by Bank of Baroda economists.

The government plans to tap small savings schemes for financing its debt beyond the record gross market borrowings of ₹15.43 lakh crore proposed in 2023-24.

Despite the increased rates on small savings, the interest costs on those borrowings will be significantly lower than the average cost range of 7.29%-7.35% estimated by the economists for the ₹8.88 lakh crore market borrowings the Centre plans to undertake in the fiscal first half.

"For 2023-24, the Government has budgeted ₹6.48 lakh crore as receipts from small savings," Bank of Baroda economist Jahnavi Abhyankar wrote in a research note. "After deducting repayments, the net securities against small savings have been earmarked at ₹4.74 lakh crore," she added.

Small price

The 10-70 basis points increase in interest rates on small savings will marginally bump up the Centre's borrowing costs

- Govt. plans to tap small savings for financing its debt beyond FY24's proposed gross market borrowings of ₹15.43 lakh crore
- Centre has budgeted ₹6.48 lakh crore as receipts from small savings this fiscal
- Interest outgo on small savings to rise to ₹43,731 crore, from ₹41,917 crore: Abhyankar

'Inched up'

"By calculating the component-wise borrowing costs and using the revised interest rates; it has been estimated the overall interest payment for government with the revision has inched up to 6.75% from 6.47%," Ms. Abhyankar said, adding this would entail a marginal uptick in the interest cost, from ₹41,917 crore based on the old rates, to ₹43,731 crore.

While the Public Provident Fund (PPF) rate has been retained at 7.1%, the Finance Ministry has raised rates for most other small savings schemes including time deposits with post offices, National Savings Certificate, Kisan Vikas Patra and the Sukanya Samriddhi Account (SSA).

The SSA will now yield 8% to investors, but the highest return is being offered on Senior Citizens' Savings Schemes at 8.2%. The returns on the PPF and the SSA are tax-free.

As per Reserve Bank of India data on small savings from last year analysed by Ms. Abhyankar, the PPF accounts for almost 8% of investments in small savings schemes, savings certificates account for another 23% and time deposits amount to 69%.

Starting Saturday, a new small savings instrument, the Mahila Samman Savings Certificate, 2023, has been introduced for women and is available at 1.59 lakh post offices. The scheme, valid for two years, offers 7.5% return for investments up to ₹2 lakh, and provides a partial withdrawal option.

Separately, the Centre has doubled the investment limit into the Senior Citizens' Savings Scheme to ₹30 lakh, and that on the Monthly Income Account Scheme to ₹9 lakh.

'Willing to amend company laws to make them robust'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Centre has no hesitation whatsoever to go to the Parliament frequently to amend corporate laws to fine tune them and make them more robust, to cater to the ever-changing requirements of the industry, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Nirmala Sitharaman

Further, recognising the resentment among certain quarters over delays in filling up vacancies in the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) as well as the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), she said, the government had taken serious note of the issue and that "of late, a lot of appointments are happening at good speed".

Govt's total liabilities rose 2.6% in Q3 FY23: report

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

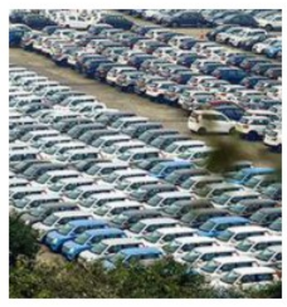
The Centre's total liabilities rose to ₹150.95 lakh crore in December 2022 quarter from ₹147.19 lakh crore in the September quarter, as per the latest public debt management report.

The rise reflects a quarter-on-quarter increase of 2.6%. With regard to the yield, interest rate on 10-year benchmark security softened from 7.40% at the close of the September quarter to 7.33% at the close of December quarter.

Maruti, Hyundai, Tata report record wholesales in FY23

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors reported their highest-ever dispatches to dealers last fiscal, enabling the domestic passenger vehicle industry to log its best-ever performance to date.



Maruti Suzuki India reported its highest wholesales to date at 19,66,164 units, up 19% from 16,52,653 units in 2021-22. Domestic dispatches rose 21% to 17,06,831 units, from 14,14,277 units.

Hyundai Motor India said overall wholesales last fiscal were the highest ever since commencing operations in the country.

The automaker dispatched 7,20,565 units to dealers last fiscal, up 18% from 6,10,760 units in 2021-22. Domestic dispatches rose to 5,67,546 units last fiscal, up 18% from 4,81,500 units in the 2021-22 financial year.

The country's second-largest carmaker said it was its best performance to date in terms of sales volume in the domestic market in a financial year.

Tata Motors also reported the best-ever passenger vehicle dispatches in the domestic market last fiscal at 5,38,640 units, up 45% from 3,70,372 units.

"We expect industry growth to be in the" 5-7% range this fiscal, said Maruti's Senior Executive Officer, Marketing and Sales, Shashank Srivastava.

Polyester, yarn makers can get BIS stamp till July 3

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

The Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals has given time till July 3 for manufacturers of polyester filament, POY, industrial, grey and white yarns to get Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) certification. The Quality Control Orders for these were earlier mandatory from April 3.

Welcoming the announcement, Ravi Sam, chairman of Southern India Mills' Association, however sought exemption for specialty fibres, be it viscose or polyester, that are not made in India.

SEBI said to be probing some Adani offshore deals for possible rule violations

Reuters
MUMBAI

India's market regulator is investigating possible violation of 'related party' transaction rules in the Adani Group's dealings with at least three offshore entities that have links to the brother of the conglomerate's founder, two people said.

The three entities allegedly entered into several investment transactions with unlisted units of the ports-to-power conglomerate founded by billionaire Gautam Adani over the last 13 years, said the sources with direct knowledge of the matter.

Vinod Adani, Gautam Adani's brother, is either a beneficial owner, director or has links with those three offshore entities, said the two sources, adding the regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is probing if lack of that disclosure violated 'related party transaction' rules.

Under Indian laws, direct relatives, promoter groups and subsidiaries of listed companies are considered related parties. A promoter group is defined as an entity that has a large shareholding in a listed company and can influence company policy.

Transactions between such entities have to be disclosed in regulatory and public filings and require shareholder approval above a set threshold.

'Aerospace sector on upswing; unlikely to see any alarming signs of recession'

Sustainability is the most critical focus area for the global aerospace industry today; India is already becoming a significant player in global aerospace industry, says Eaton's Aerospace Group executive

INTERVIEW

Desmond Goh

Mini Tejaswi

The aerospace industry is now witnessing an upswing globally and is unlikely to see any alarming signs of recession, said Desmond Goh, MD-Asia Pacific, Aerospace Group, Eaton, a Dublin-based intelligent power management firm.

What will be the impact of a global recession and the ongoing geopolitical tensions on the aerospace sector as a whole?

The aerospace industry typically has a much longer business cycle, compared to many other industries including software and fintech. In fact, the aerospace industry has just gotten out of the recession, after the pandemic. It is on an upswing and is expected to continue to see a rising market for some time. We are continuing to monitor the situation, however, from the overall industry or from market perspective, we don't see any near-term alarming signs.

What are the emerging trends in the industry?

Sustainability is one of the most dominant trends that is sweeping across the global aerospace industry today. It's about developing the most sustainable aircraft, designing the best energy-efficient engines and deploying more eco-friendly systems. It is about electrification, additive manufacturing and 3D printing, to minimise the use of aviation fuel, reduce the weight of the aircraft, and bring down the impact of flying on the planet.

Is India on the same page as global industry?

India is already becoming a significant player in the global aerospace industry. For instance, Aero India 2023 held in Bengaluru, saw a substantial presence of the entire ecosystem and not just traditional market segments like Boeing, Airbus and Cummins.

THE HINDU GROUP

FRONTLINE
LEADING THE DEBATE SINCE 1984

The Amritpal Singh mystery

Who is Amritpal Singh? Frontline got one of the last interviews with the radical preacher and separatist before he went on the run. While the interview throws light on his meteoric rise, writers such as Manjit Singh, Amandeep Sandhu, and Saba Naqvi speak of what makes Punjab vulnerable to the likes of an Amritpal.

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Butter chicken and bhangra. But also killer debts and Khalistan. What are the things that define Punjab? And what lies beneath?

Rahul Gandhi vs the BJP. The battle for power between the Congress and the BJP gets uglier with each passing day. Where does this leave the so-called third bloc?

Mallika Sarabhai. The new Chancellor of the famed Kerala Kalamandalam outlines her plans to repurpose, refocus, and repackage the 93-year-old institute.

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A BG-BGE

LIGHTS OUT!

Floodlights malfunction, lead to delay in chase

Kolkata Knight Riders' chase against Punjab Kings in the IPL match on Saturday was delayed by almost half an hour due to floodlight malfunction. The PCA-IS Bindra Stadium has six floodlights at a comparatively lower height. Once the Knight Riders came out to bat, quite a few bulbs in multiple towers didn't turn on.

AMAZING

Ruturaj's sixes were clean and pure timing, says Kumble

Anil Kumble was impressed with CSK opener Ruturaj Gaikwad's six-hitting prowess during his knock of 92 against Gujarat Titans on Friday. "We don't associate him (Ruturaj) with six hitting, but to smash nine sixes in an innings is really amazing. It was not like he was going out of shape and trying to muscle it, just pure timing," said Kumble.

IN THE BALANCE

Knee injury may cut short Williamson's IPL stint

New Zealand captain and Gujarat Titans' Kane Williamson's continuation in the IPL season is in doubt after he suffered a right knee injury in the match against Chennai Super Kings on Friday. He was injured while attempting to intercept a possible six hit by Ruturaj Gaikwad and limped off the field in the 13th over.

ALL PRAISE

Hangargekar has pace and will get better with time, says Dhoni

CSK skipper M.S. Dhoni praised IPL debutant Rajvardhan Hangargekar who took three wickets in the match against Gujarat Titans. "I think Raj (Hangargekar) has pace and he will get better with time. I think the bowlers will get better, a no-ball is something that's in your control, so you need to work on that," said Dhoni.

Rain scuttles KKR's chase, swings it Punjab Kings' way

Knight Riders had clawed back to launch a final assault, but was still behind the DLS par score by seven runs when play was stopped at the end of the 16th over

IPL-16

M.R. Praveen Chandran
MOHALI

The rain came as an uninvited guest, killed a gripping contest and handed host Punjab Kings a seven-run win (DRS method) over Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League at the I.S. Bindra Stadium here on Saturday.

Chasing 192, Knight Riders had clawed back to launch a final assault on the target when heavy rain stopped play at the end of the 16th over. Knight Riders, who were 146 for seven at the time of stoppage, was behind the DLS par score by seven runs.

Taking flight: Arshdeep's strikes at the top of the order put the skids on Knight Riders after Rajapaksa guided Kings to a big total. R.V. MOORTHY

Early blows

After Arshdeep Singh dealt early blows, Andre Russell (35) and Impact Player Venkatesh Iyer (34) revived a hopeless chase with a quickfire stand of 50 runs for the sixth wicket.

But the loss of both the batters in quick succession put paid to Knight Riders' hopes.

In hindsight, the 23-minute delay due to the malfunctioning of light towers at the start hurt Knight Riders' chase.

Earlier, put in, Punjab Kings got off to a rollicking start with opener Prabhsimran Singh setting the early pace with a nonchalant flick over square-leg for six off Umesh Yadav. Tim Southee's erring line was also punished as Prabhsimran clattered a couple of boundaries and hoisted a six before edging a catch to wicketkeeper Rahmanullah Gurbaz in the same over.

Bhanuka Rajapaksa continued the carnage, stepping out thrice to loft Sunil Narine for two boundaries and a six in the leg-spinner's first over in the PowerPlay. While Shikar Dhawan dropped anchor, Bhanuka attacked the bowling and Shardul Thakur bore the brunt of his forcing strokes.

The Sri Lankan completed his 50 off 30 balls before holing out to long-on off Umesh Yadav.

Varun Chakravarthy's strangulating spell in the second half of the innings, during which he cleaned up Dhawan (40), slowed down the scoring. But a late flourish from Sam Curran (21 not out) and Shahrukh Khan (11 not out) saw Kings finish with what proved a match-winning total.

SCOREBOARD

PUNJAB KINGS
Prabhsimran Singh c Gurbaz b Southee 23 *(12b, 2x4, 2x6)*, Shikhar Dhawan b Varun 40 *(29b, 6x4)*, Bhanuka Rajapaksa c Rinku b Umesh 50 *(32b, 5x4, 2x6)*, Jitesh Sharma c Umesh b Southee 21 *(11b, 1x4, 2x6)*, Sikandar Raza c Nitish b Narine 16 *(13b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Sam Curran (not out) 26 *(17b, 2x6)*, M. Shahrukh Khan (not out) 11 *(7b, 2x4)*; Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-2): 4; Total (for five wkts. in 20 overs): 191.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-23 (Prabhsimran, 1.6 overs), 2-109 (Rajapaksa, 10.6), 3-135 (Jitesh, 13.3), 4-143 (Dhawan, 14.3), 5-168 (Raza, 17.5).

KNIGHT RIDERS BOWLING
Umesh 4-0-27-1, Southee 4-0-54-2, Narine 4-0-40-1, Varun 4-0-26-1, Shardul 4-0-43-0.

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS
Mandeep Singh c Curran b Arshdeep 2 *(4b)*, Rahmanullah Gurbaz b Ellis 22 *(16b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Anukul Roy c Raza b Arshdeep 4 *(5b, 1x5)*, Venkatesh Iyer **(Impact Player in place of Varun)** c Rahul Chahar b Arshdeep 34 *(28b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Nitish Rana c Rahul Chahar b Raza 24 *(17b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Rinku Singh c Raza b Rahul Chahar 4 *(4b)*, Andre Russell c Raza b Curran 35 *(19b, 3x4, 2x6)*, Shardul Thakur (not out) 8 *(3b, 1x6)*, Sunil Narine (not out) 7 *(2b, 1x6)*; Extras (b-1, lb-2, nb-2, w-1): 6; Total (for seven wkts. in 16 overs): 146.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-13 (Mandeep, 1.1), 2-17 (Anukul, 1.6), 3-29 (Gurbaz, 4.2), 4-75 (Nitish, 9.2), 5-80 (Rinku, 10.1), 6-130 (Russell, 14.5), 7-138 (Venkatesh, 15.3).

PUNJAB KINGS BOWLING
Curran 3-0-38-1, Arshdeep 3-0-19-3, Ellis 3-0-27-1, Raza 3-0-25-1, Rishi **(Impact Player in place of Rajapaksa)** 1-0-15-0, Rahul Chahar 2-0-12-1, Harpreet 1-0-7-0.

Toss: Knight Riders; **PoM:** Arshdeep.

Punjab Kings won by seven runs by DLS method.

Next assignment

PBKS: April 5 vs. RR Guwahati, 7.30 p.m.

KKR: April 6 vs. RCB Kolkata, 7.30 p.m.

After Mayers and Pooran flay the Capitals attack, Wood fires Lucknow to comfortable victory

Super Giants: Mayers went ballistic at the top of the order for Super Giants before Wood proved unplayable. AP

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LUCKNOW

A dash of Caribbean flair and a fiery Mark Wood proved too hot for Delhi Capitals on Saturday night.

Lucknow Super Giants, after posting 193 for six, won by 50 runs to open its campaign on a splendid note at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Cricket Stadium.

If South Africa was not playing an ODI series at home against the Netherlands at the moment, Kyle Mayers would probably have had to wait longer for his IPL debut.

Since Quinton de Kock is on national duty, the West Indian got his Super Giants cap.

Brilliant innings

Mayers – he had scored a double hundred on his Test debut – made a brilliant 73 off 38 balls (2x4, 7x6), before Wood's five-wicket haul destroyed the Capitals batting.

It was a sensational spell by Wood. He struck twice in as many balls to put the brakes on the Capitals chase.

The England quick not merely ended the opening stand of 41 between captain David Warner (56, 48b, 7x4) and Prithvi Shaw, he removed the dangerous Mitchell Marsh with his next ball. Both the batters were beaten by the express pace.

Once Rilee Rossouw (30, 20b, 3x4, 1x6) fell lbw to Ravi Bishnoi, on review, it was going to be an uphill task.

Slow start

Earlier, Super Giants could make only 30 for one from the PowerPlay. With the new ball, Khaleel Ahmed and Mukesh Kumar had been getting some swing.

But before long, it was Mayers who was swinging the bowlers out of the park.

Turning point

The left-handed opener had been dropped on 14, by Khaleel off Chetan Sakariya.

That proved a turning point in the match. Mayers looked majestic, as he displayed timing, power – even outside edges went for the maximum – and the unmistakable Caribbean flair. He also saw his captain K.L. Rahul depart early after flicking Sakariya's shorter, slower ball to Axar Patel at deep backward square-leg.

The excellent home crowd got to watch more of the left-handed Caribbean flair a little later on, as Nicholas Pooran slammed a 21-ball 36 (2x4, 3x6).

Their flair was complemented by Wood's fire.

SCOREBOARD

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS
K.L. Rahul c Axar b Sakariya 8 *(12b, 1x6)*, Kyle Mayers b Axar 73 *(38b, 2x4, 7x6)*, Deepak Hooda c Warner b Kuldeep Yadav 17 *(18b)*, Krunal Pandya (not out) 15 *(13b, 1x6)*, Marcus Stoinis c Sarfaraz b Khaleel 12 *(10b, 1x6)*, Nicholas Pooran c Shaw b Khaleel 36 *(21b, 2x4, 3x6)*, Ayush Badoni c Sarfaraz b Sakariya 18 *(7b, 1x4, 2x6)*, K. Gowtham **(Impact Player in place of Badoni)** (not out) 6 *(1b, 1x6)*; Extras (b-1, lb-2, w-5): 8; Total (for six wkts. in 20 overs): 193.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-19 (Rahul, 3.6 overs), 2-98 (Hooda, 10.6), 3-100 (Mayers, 11.3), 4-117 (Stoinis, 14.1), 5-165 (Pooran, 18.3), 6-187 (Badoni, 19.5).

CAPITALS BOWLING
Khaleel 4-0-30-2, Mukesh Kumar 4-0-34-0, Sakariya 4-0-53-2, Axar 4-0-38-1, Kuldeep Yadav 4-0-35-1.

DELHI CAPITALS
Prithvi Shaw b Wood 12 *(9b, 2x4)*, David Warner c Gowtham b Avesh 56 *(48b, 7x4)*, Mitchell Marsh b Wood 0 *(1b)*, Sarfaraz Khan c Gowtham b Wood 4 *(9b, 1x4)*, Rilee Rossouw c Mayers b Bishnoi 30 *(20b, 3x4, 1x6)*, Rovman Powell lbw b Bishnoi 1 *(3b)*, Aman Khan **(Impact Player in place of Khaleel)** c Pooran b Avesh 4 *(5b)*, Axar Patel c sub (Mankad) b Wood 16 *(11b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Kuldeep Yadav (not out) 6 *(10b)*, Chetan Sakariya c Krunal b Wood 4 *(4b, 1x4)*, Mukesh Kumar (not out) 0 *(1b)*; Extras (w-9, nb-1): 10; Total (for nine wkts. in 20 overs): 143.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-41 (Shaw, 4.3), 2-41 (Marsh, 4.4), 3-48 (Sarfaraz, 6.6), 4-86 (Rossouw, 11.6), 5-94 (Powell, 13.4), 6-112 (Aman, 15.3), 7-113 (Warner, 15.6), 8-139 (Axar, 19.1), 9-143 (Sakariya, 19.5).

SUPER GIANTS BOWLING
Mayers 1-0-7-0, Unadkat 3-0-39-0, Gowtham 4-0-23-0, Avesh 4-0-29-2, Wood 4-0-14-5, Bishnoi 4-0-31-2.

Toss: Delhi Capitals; **PoM:** Wood.

Lucknow Super Giants won by 50 runs.

Next assignment

LSG: April 3 vs. CSK Chennai, 7.30 p.m.

DC: April 4 vs. GT Delhi, 7.30 p.m.

We were a bit match underdone, admits CSK coach Fleming

The finishers: Rashid and Tewatia took Titans over the line. VIJAY SONEJI

N. Sudarshan
AHMEDABAD

Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming felt that his team was a bit "match underdone" in the five-wicket defeat to defending champion Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium here on Friday.

"I thought we were a little bit short," Fleming said, after the match. "We created enough opportunities. Ruturaj [Gaikwad] played a great hand, but around him we couldn't capitalise on a couple of good positions we got into.

"They [Titans] bowled well from 12 to 16 overs. We couldn't get that final push we needed. 180 is a good score, but we were in a position to get 190 or 200. They brought it back well.

"We were also a bit match underdone... first game and we were looking at what tempo to play. But I loved the positivity and the aggression. On any other day we would have got 200. I loved the aggressive nature of the innings," the Kiwi added.

Titans, for whom Shubman Gill top-scored (63, 36b, 6x4, 3x6), reached the 179-run target only in the last over, having to rely in the end on the bludgeoning blades of Rashid Khan (10, 3b) and Rahul Tewatia (15, 14b). But skipper Hardik Pandya stated that at no point was the team worried. "Just that we lost one too many wickets," Hardik said. "What Rashid did, we sort of expected. We have a lot of trust in his batting."

"When we lost [Kane] Williamson (to a knee injury), it did set us a little back. The kind of shots Shubman [Gill] and I played put us in a [slightly] difficult situation.

"But Rahul getting the best out of his ability and Rashid coming out and showing what he can do... overall happy, but quite a lot to learn."

RCB faces litmus test in its opener against MI

Du Plessis' men keen to break the title duck after entering playoffs the last three seasons, Kohli's batting spot adds interesting sub-plot; visitors look to make amends for poor show last year

IPL-16

Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) will face the might of five-time champion Mumbai Indians (MI) in their IPL 2023 opener, at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Saturday.

The new season presents yet another chance for RCB to finally claim a maiden IPL trophy.

Skipper Faf du Plessis will lead a side which has made it to the playoff stage for the last three seasons, but is yet to take that final step to reach the top of the hill.

RCB will miss the services of Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood, who is out with an injury.

Looking to Topley

England left-arm seamer Reece Topley has been brought in as cover, even if it is tough to fill the shoes of a proven performer like Hazlewood.

It remains to be seen if RCB uses Virat Kohli as an opener, or in a middle-order role he plays for the Indian team.

Skippers' tale: Rohit will be eager to fire while du Plessis will look to go all the way. K. MURALI KUMAR

MI, meanwhile, will be thrilled to welcome England pace ace Jofra Archer back into the fold. Archer, who did not feature in the previous edition, will test the RCB batters with his pace and bounce.

MI skipper Rohit Sharma will look to correct his poor run in the last IPL season. There can be no better opportunity to do so than on a batting-friendly M. Chinnaswamy Stadium pitch.

TODAY'S MATCHES

SRH vs. RR	RCB vs. MI
Hyderabad, 3.30 p.m.	Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.
HEAD-TO-HEAD	HEAD-TO-HEAD
Played: 16	Played: 30
SRH 8 | RR 8	RCB 13 | MI 17
PREVIOUS MEETING	PREVIOUS MEETING
RR won by 61 runs, 2022	RCB won by seven wickets, 2022

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIO CINEMA APP

Former champions Sunrisers and Royals come to grips

Rise and shine: Bhuvneshwar, who will lead in the first game, will be keen to swing things Sunrisers' way. Royals' spin duo of Chahal and R. Ashwin will look to forge a lethal combination. NAGARA GOPAL

V.V. Subrahmanyam
HYDERABAD

Former champions Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals will look to start the fresh season of Tata IPL on a winning note when the teams clash on what looks to be a perfect batting strip at the Rajiv Gandhi Stadium (Uppal) here on Sunday afternoon.

With captain Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen, who are on national duty for South Africa and not available for the opener, seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar will lead SRH in Sunday's game.

Last year's runner-up Royals bank heavily on inform Jos Buttler and leggie Yuzvendra Chahal, winners of the Orange and Purple Caps in the last season.

Royals would look to Buttler to continue his recent, impressive form and joining him at the top will be the very promising Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Another equally-talented youngster Devdutt Padikkal will be followed by captain Sanju Samson.

West Indian batter Shimron Hetmyer adds the extra dimension to the Royals batting with his explosive batting.

In bowling, the crafty R. Ashwin should be the one to watch in the company of pacers left-armer Trent Boult, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma and Obed McCoy.

On the other hand, SRH's hopes hinge on the form of the batters – the big-hitting Harry Brook, Glen Phillips, experienced Mayank Agarwal, Amolpreet Singh, Abdul Samad, left-arm spinning all-rounder Abhishek Sharma and Rahul Tripathi.

The SRH bowling attack has a lot of depth and variety.

It comprises the likes of leggie Adil Rashid, pacers Kartik Tyagi, Bhubaneswar, Umran Malik, and T. Natarajan, all capable of testing the best of batters with all-rounder Washington Sundar ready for any challenge.

Teams ready for new season, new challenges

V.V. Subrahmanyam
HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Bhuvneshwar Kumar felt confident that the issue of finding finishers has been sorted out. "I think the middle-order is well-settled now," he said.

On Harry Brook, the SRH captain felt that contrary to the general impression about foreign players, he was very good against spinners. "We hope he continues his recent good form in the T20 Leagues," he said. "It is a new season and a different challenge with new domestic and international players."

"The bowling unit is very experienced now. Umran is the youngest but he is also experienced now and he has played for the country. He did well in the last season as well. It is just a matter of going out there and doing well," he said.

Kumara Sangakkara, Royals Director of Cricket and head coach, said they had a great last season but this season is different with new rules and different players.

"We discussed the (Impact Player) rule and we have got that right, hopefully. But, as the league goes on, the teams will get more and more used to how well to use it," Sangakkara said.

Rohit raring to go, Archer 'ready to come steaming in to bowl' against RCB

Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

Mumbai Indians (MI) head coach Mark Boucher stated that skipper Rohit Sharma is fit and raring to go in the IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) here on Sunday. Rohit did not attend the IPL captains' photoshoot a few days ago, raising concerns about his fitness.

"Rohit Sharma is fit. He didn't feel well on the morning of the photoshoot. As a precaution, he stayed at home. But he has trained with us in the last two days, and he is 100 per cent ready to go," Boucher said.

Jofra Archer missed MI's optional training session here on Saturday, but the fast bowler is "ready to put the spikes on and come steaming in tomorrow to bowl," Boucher said.

Words of wisdom: Javagal Srinath speaks to RCB's Bangar and du Plessis at a practice session. MI's Boucher gives Brevis a few pointers ahead of their opener. K. MURALI KUMAR

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) head coach Sanjay Bangar stated that the side hopes that batter Rajat Patidar recovers quickly from an injury. Patidar is currently undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy here, and is set to miss RCB's first few matches

"The situation with Rajat is out of our control. He is undergoing treatment at NCA. We are awaiting clarification from him," Bangar said in a press conference here on Saturday.

Bangar hinted that the onus lies on the NCA to release him for RCB duty quickly. "NCA might take a sporting call on what his future holds," Bangar said.

Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga is away with international commitments, and will join the RCB squad on April 9, Bangar said.

Tuchel begins Bayern stint with emphatic win over Dortmund

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse
MUNICH

Bayern Munich went back to the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday, defeating Borussia Dortmund 4-2 at home to give Thomas Tuchel a winning start as coach of the Bavarian giant.

A shocking own goal from Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel, as well as two trademark finishes from Thomas Muller had Bayern 3-0 up by the 25th minute. Kingsley Coman added a fourth shortly after half-time to send Bayern two points clear of the visitors despite two late consolation goals.

Tuchel, who won a German Cup title during a two-year stint in charge of Dortmund, had one only training session with Bayern before this match.

Muller the menace: The German slotted home two goals and proved a constant threat. AP

In the Premier League, Gabriel Jesus scored his first goals for six months as Arsenal maintained control of the title race with a 4-1 defeat of relegation-threatened Leeds United.

Manchester City showed it can win without goal machine Erling Haaland as it put four goals past Liverpool.

Julian Alvarez, Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan and Jack Grealish were all on target for Pep Guardiola's side in an entertaining return to Premier League action after the international break.

Arsenal's seventh successive league win moved it to 72 points from 29 games with City on 64 having played one game less.

Important results:

Premier League: Arsenal 4 (Jesus 35-pen, 55, White 47, Xhaka 84) bt Leeds 1 (Kristensen 76); Crystal Palace 2 (Iversen 59-og, Mateta 90+4) bt Leicester 1 (Pereira 56); Manchester City 4 (Alvarez 27, De Bruyne 46, Gundogan 53, Grealish 74) bt Liverpool 1 (Salah 17).

Bundesliga: Bayern Munich 4 (Kobel 13-og, Mueller 18 & 23, Coman 50) bt Borussia Dortmund 2 (Can 72-pen, Malen 90); RB Leipzig 0 lost to Mainz 05 3 (Ingvartsen 9, Ajorque 57, Kohr 67); Union Berlin 3 (Becker 51, Behrens 65, Ito 68-og) bt VfB Stuttgart 0.

Sinner deals Alcaraz a double blow

Big flex: Sinner got the better of Alcaraz in an enthralling and entertaining power-hitting performance. GETTY IMAGES

Agence France-Presse
MIAMI GARDENS

Jannik Sinner ended Carlos Alcaraz's hopes of the 'Sunshine Double' and his reign as World No. 1, winning 6-7(4), 6-4, 6-2 in the Miami Open semifinal on Friday. It had been an enthralling power-hitting performance from both men in the first set, with an incredible 25-shot exchange in the seventh game. The intense, high quality set was eventually won by the Spaniard, but an inspired Sinner fought back and won in three hours.

Sinner will meet Russian Daniil Medvedev, a 7-6(5), 3-6, 6-3 winner over countryman Karen Khachanov. In the women's final, Elena Rybakina will meet Petra Kvitova who beat Sorana Cirstea 7-5, 6-4.

Blasters likely to appeal Vukomanovic's 10-match ban and hefty fine

Stan Rayan
KOCHI

The Kerala Blasters are likely to appeal against the All India Football Federation Disciplinary Committee's decision on Friday to fine them ₹4 crore for walking off the pitch and thereby forfeiting their Indian Super League playoff match against Bengaluru FC in Bengaluru on March 3.

After hearing all the parties concerned, the AIFF Disciplinary Committee – chaired by Vaibhav Gaggar – also directed Blasters to issue a 'public apology' for the unsporting conduct of abandoning the match, failing which the total fine would be increased to ₹6 crore.

The club is yet to officially come out with its response but sources in the team said Blasters would appeal against the AIFF Disciplinary Committee's order.

Despite the walkout, there is a huge wave of support for Blasters from their fans – the club is the team with the biggest fan base in the ISL – and it is not clear at this stage whether the public apology would happen, though the threat that the penalty would be raised by ₹2 crore could move the club to come out with one.

The Blasters' walkout happened after a hotly-disputed goal scored by Bengaluru's Sunil Chhetri off a freekick. The Kochi-based club had filed a protest to the AIFF earlier against referee Crystal John for the manner in which he allowed Chhetri to take the freekick that resulted in the goal. But it was rejected.

The AIFF Disciplinary Committee's order on Friday also punished the Blasters' head coach Ivan Vukomanovic, who it said had instigated the team to abandon the match and brought the game into disrepute, with a 10-match suspension from AIFF-held tournaments irrespective of whichever team he is contracted with, along with a fine of ₹5 lakh under Article 9.1.2 (of the AIFF disciplinary code). This will mean that Vukomanovic would not be permitted to be a part of the team's dressing room or the team bench.

Vukomanovic.

Vukomanovic has also been directed to issue a 'public apology' for his misconduct failing which the fine to be imposed on him would be increased to ₹10 lakh along with the ban.

Comply in a week

The disciplinary committee has directed the Blasters and Vukomanovic to comply with this order within one week.

However, the club and the head coach have a right to file an appeal against the order.

The Blasters are scheduled to play the Super Cup, the tournament will see ISL and I-League teams play each other, which begins in Kozhikode and Manjeri on April 8.

Kush Maini bags his maiden podium

Press Trust of India
MELBOURNE

Indian driver Kush Maini of Campos Racing fought off a strong challenge from Arthur Leclerc of DAMS in a rain-interrupted race to claim his first-ever Formula 2 podium with a third-place finish at the Albert Park, here on Saturday.

Maini started from P3 on the grid on prime tyres and held on to his position for several laps while Arthur Leclerc was right behind him putting pressure on the softer tyres. Leclerc got past Maini but the Indian fought back and made a last second dive onto the inside and got back P3.

Leclerc kept the pressure on through the safety car restarts but Maini held on to a well-deserved maiden podium in F2. "It was great to get my first podium on a new track as a rookie. It is most important to keep consistent as it's a very long series. We have had a good start to the season so far with consistency in qualifying always in the top 8," said the 22-year-old.

Maini... what a feeling!
TWITTER/KMAINIOFFICIAL

Dennis Hauger (MP Motorsport) and Jak Crawford (Hitech Pulse-Eight) took the top-two spots.

Jehan Daruvala, driving for MP Motorsport, finished a disappointing 17th.

INBRIEF

Bavuma takes South Africa closer to WC qualification

Captain Temba Bavuma took South Africa closer to automatic World Cup qualification with an unbeaten 90 in an eight-wicket win over the Netherlands in the second ODI in Benoni on Friday. A win in Johannesburg on Sunday – or a no-result – will take South Africa into the eighth and final qualification place for the World Cup in India in October and November.

The scores: Netherlands 189 in 46.1 overs (Vikramjit Singh 45, Teja Nidamanuru 48; Tabraiz Shamsi 3/25, Sisanda Magala 3/37) lost to South Africa 190/2 in 30 overs (Temba Bavuma 90 n.o., Aiden Markram 51 n.o.).

Verstappen takes second pole of the year in a tight session

Double World champion Max Verstappen claimed pole on Saturday for the Australian Grand Prix ahead of Mercedes' George Russell, but his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez had a torrid time and will start last. Lewis Hamilton in the other Mercedes was third ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso in a tight session that went to the wire. It was the second pole of the year for Dutchman Verstappen.

LIVE TELECAST

NBA: MTV, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 5 a.m.
Formula One: Australian GP, F1 TV Pro & F1 TV App, 10.30 a.m.
BWF: Madrid Masters: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 1.30 p.m.
IPL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 3.30 & 7.30 p.m.
Serie A: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 4, 6.30, 9.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Monday)
LaLiga: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 5.30, 7.45, 10 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Monday)
Premier League: SS Select 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 6.30 & 9 p.m.
Bundesliga: Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LIV, 7 & 9 p.m.

Sindhu on the cusp of glory

Overcomes Min in an intense semifinal; Tunjung stuns top seed Marin

Focused: Sindhu kept her nerve to prevail over Min. FILE PHOTO

MADRID MASTERS

Press Trust of India
MADRID

P.V. Sindhu reached her first final of the year as she eked out a straight-game victory over Singapore's Yeo Jia Min at the Madrid Spain Masters Super 300 tournament here on Saturday.

The second-seeded Indian toiled hard for 48 minutes to pull off a 24-22, 22-20 win over the lower-ranked Singaporean shuttler in an intensely fought semifinals. Sindhu had come into the match with a 4-0 head-to head record against Min.

Trailing 15-20, Sindhu, showed immense fighting spirit as she saved seven game points to take the first game 24-22. She used the body smash to great effect and converted the only game point opportunity she had.

In the second game, Sindhu trailed 1-4, before opening a five point lead at 11-6. World No. 33 Min however, played a gorgeous drop shot to level at 17-17. Sindhu then had two match points but Min manage to save both of them before driving one wide, giving the Indian her third match point. This time Sindhu made no errors as Min found the net.

Sindhu will take on Indonesia's Gregoria Tunjung, who stunned the top seed and local favourite Carolina Marin 10-21, 21-15, 21-10.

The win will come as a huge morale boost for Sindhu who has been struggling for form since returning to action following a long injury lay-off.

She made a first round exit from the All England Championship and failed to defend her Swiss Open title. She had also made first-round exits at the Indian Open and Malaysia Open in January.

Bibisara holds Humpy, regains lead

FIDE WOMEN'S GP

Rakesh Rao
NEW DELHI

K. Humpy and new leader Bibisara Assaubayeva drew while R. Vaishali proved equal to D. Harika in the seventh round of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix chess tournament here on Saturday.

When Humpy agreed to Bibisara's draw offer, computer-aided evaluation of the position showed the Kazakh had erred with her last move, a pawn-push on the king's side.

The 37-move draw gave Bibisara (4.5 points) a half-a-point lead.

The Vaishali-Harika encounter involved a series of exchanges that left the kings and three pawns of each colour on the board when a draw was agreed in 42 moves.

Aleksandra Goryachkina scored her third victory to be within striking distance of the leader.

She defeated Georgia's Nino Batsiashvili to keep alive her prospects of catching up with Bibisara, who has played a game more.

In the day's other decisive game, Kateryna Lagno weaved a checkmating net around Nana Dzagnidge's to win in 29 moves.

The results (seventh round): Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz, 4.5) drew with K. Humpy (3); R. Vaishali (1.5) drew with D. Harika (2); Nino Batsiashvili (Geo, 1.5) lost to Aleksandra Goryachkina (FIDE, 3.5); Nana Dzagnidze (Geo, 2) lost to Kateryna Lagno (FIDE, 3.5); Zhu Jiner (Chn, 4), Polina Shuvalova (FIDE, 2.5) bye.

SNAPSHOTS

Yuki-Saketh duo wins its seventh Challenger title

GIRONA: Yuki Bhambri and Saketh Myneni defeated the Spanish duo of Oriol Batalla and Inigo Servantes 6-4, 6-4 in the final of the €73,000 Challenger in Girona on Saturday. This is the seventh Challenger title from eight finals for the Indian pair.

Ankita Raina beat China's Hanyu Guo 7-6(3), 6-4 to make the final of the $25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in Jakarta. In the final, fourth-seeded Ankita will play another Chinese, Zhuoxuan Bai.

Sasikumar and Vishnuvardhan take the honours

MYSURU: The unseeded duo of Sasikumar Mukund and P. Vishnuvardhan scored an upset 6-3, 6-4 win over top seeds Rithvik Choudary and Niki Poonacha 6-3, 6-4 to clinch the doubles title in the M25 WTT ITF men's tennis tournament on Saturday.

In the singles event, eighth-seeded Australian Blake Ellis outwitted second seed Oliver Crawford (USA) 7-5, 6-3 to enter the final.

He will take on unseeded George Loffhagen, who staved off the challenge from local lad S.D. Prajwal Dev 7-5, 6-4.

Sabeera misses semifinals shotgun WC

LARNACA (CYPRUS): Sabeera Haris shot 108 and missed the semifinals by four points in women's trap in the shotgun World Cup on Saturday.

Sabeera had a series of 23, 21, 20, 22 and 22.

Spanish delight: Saketh and Yuki picked up another Challenger crown on Saturday. INSTAGRAM/YUKIBHAMBRI

In men's trap, Lakshay Sheoran shot 114 for the 50th place in a field of 131 shooters.

Competing in the RPO section, Prithviraj Tondaiman could muster only 110, following a series of 21, 24, 21, 22 and 22.

Uzbekistan beats India to finish 13th

KUCHING (MALAYSIA): The Indian boys were beaten 2-1 by Uzbekistan in the match for the 13th place in the Asia-Oceania World junior under-14 tennis tournament on Saturday.

The results: Final: Japan bt Pakistan 2-1.
Play-off 13th place: Uzbekistan bt India 2-1 (Abdulkhodiy Khosilov bt Rudra Batham 6-4, 6-2; Akmal Abdullaev bt Shivtej Shirfule 1-6, 7-5, [10-6]; Akmal & Abdulkhodiy lost to Rudra & Shivtej w/o).

Karnataka women post another win

BENGALURU: Karnataka ran out an easy 3-1 victor over Assam for its second straight win in Group Six of the 27th Senior Women's National football championship on Friday.

The results: Karnataka 3 (Maitreyi Palasamudram 9, Sonia Marak 13, Sanjita Niroula 48) bt Assam 1 (Yangoijam Kiran Bala Chanu 87); Gujarat 3 (Khushbu Saroj 40, 50, 66) bt Bihar 0.

Rohit extends contract with Bengaluru FC

Bengaluru FC, on Saturday, announced a two-year contract extension for midfielder Rohit Kumar. The Delhi-born Rohit signed for the club ahead of the 2021-22 campaign and has now committed his future until the end of the 2024-25 campaign.

The 26-year-old was part of BFC's victorious 2022 Durand Cup squad, and enjoyed a breakout campaign.

Scoring three times across 19 Indian Super League appearances, Rohit played a crucial role in Bengaluru's run to the ISL final.

Subsequently, he received a maiden call-up to the National team, and made his debut against Kyrgyz Republic in India's victorious Tri-Nation Cup campaign in Manipur.

Vedant nets BTM FC's winner

Vedant Maneesh Satarkar's 77th minute winner helped BTM FC edge Blitz FC 1-0 in the BDFA A-division football league here on Friday.

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